The New Criterion

March 1990

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

Notes & Comments, 1
On "Sexual Personae" *by Roger Kimball,* 7
The drawings of David Smith *by Karen Wilkin,* 13
Arnold Toynbee *by Elie Kedourie,* 18
Autobiography today *by James W. Tuttleton,* 32
Thomas Kinsella *by Floyd Skloot,* 41
Poems *by Elizabeth Spires & Brad Leithauser,* 48

Music: A recital of Pollini's *by Samuel Lipman,* 53; **Art:** Classics without commercials *by Jed Perl,* 59

Books: *Michael Meyer, editor* The collected poems of Sidney Keyes *reviewed by Robert Richman,* 65; *Don Bachardy & James P. White, editors* Where joy resides: a Christopher Isherwood reader *reviewed by David Pryce-Jones,* 70; *Winston S. Churchill* Selected early works *reviewed by David Fromkin,* 73; **Letters,** 78

Volume 8, Number 7
$4.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stuart Davis

'scapes

An Exhibition of
Landscapes, Seascapes and Cityscapes

March 2 to 31
Fully illustrated catalogue with text is available

The Estate of Stuart Daivs is represented by

Salander-O'Reilly Galleries

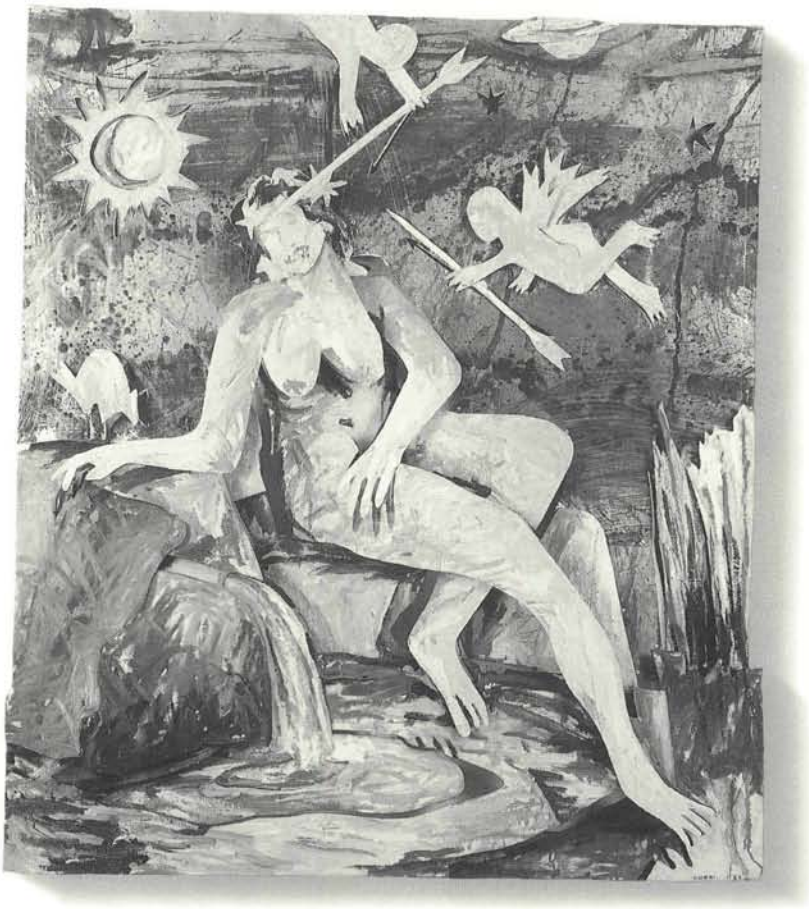
20 East 79 Street New York, NY 10021

Tel (212) 879-6606 Fax 212 744 0655

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Andres
NAGEL

March 9 — April 22



Venus, 1988. Oil on polyester and fiberglass, 65 by 57 by 8 inches.

Catalogue $12 postpaid

Tasende Gallery

820 Prospect Street La Jolla, California 92037
Tel 619-454-3691 Fax 619-454-0589

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arthur Gibbons

New Sculpture · March 29 to April 21

André Emmerich Gallery

41 East 57th Street, New York 10022

Telephone (212) 752-0124 Fax 212 371 7345

Catalogue available on request.

Chimera, 1989. Painted and waxed steel, 5 ft. 3 in. × 2 ft. 3 in. × 1 ft. 7 in. (160 × 69 × 48 cm)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New Criterion *March 1990*

Editor *Hilton Kramer*
Publisher *Samuel Lipman*
Managing Editor *Roger Kimball*
Poetry Editor *Robert Richman*
Assistant Managing Editor *Christopher Carduff*
Office Manager *Marjorie Danser*

Contributors to this issue

David Fromkin is the author of *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922* (Holt).

Elie Kedourie, Professor of Politics at the University of London, is this year Visiting Research Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. A new edition of his book *England and the Middle East* was recently published by Westview.

Roger Kimball's book, *Tenured Radicals,* will be published next month by Harper & Row.

Brad Leithauser's new collection of poems, *The Mail From Anywhere,* is forthcoming from Alfred A. Knopf.

Samuel Lipman's new book, *Arguing for Music, Arguing for Culture,* will be published in June by David R. Godine.

Jed Perl is the author of *Paris Without End: On French Art Since World War I* (North Point Press).

David Pryce-Jones is a novelist, critic, and historian. His most recent book is *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs* (Harper & Row).

Robert Richman is the editor of *The Direction of Poetry,* published by Houghton Mifflin.

Floyd Skloot, a poet, has contributed prose to *Commonweal, Eire-Ireland,* and *Northwest Review.*

Elizabeth Spires's most recent book is *Annonciade* (Viking).

James W. Tuttleton is Professor of English Literature at New York University and the author of *The Novel of Manners in America* (Norton).

Karen Wilkin wrote a Letter from Paris for our January issue.

Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. March 1990, Volume 8, Number 7. Subscriptions: $32 for one year, $60 for two. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send changes of address to 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019.

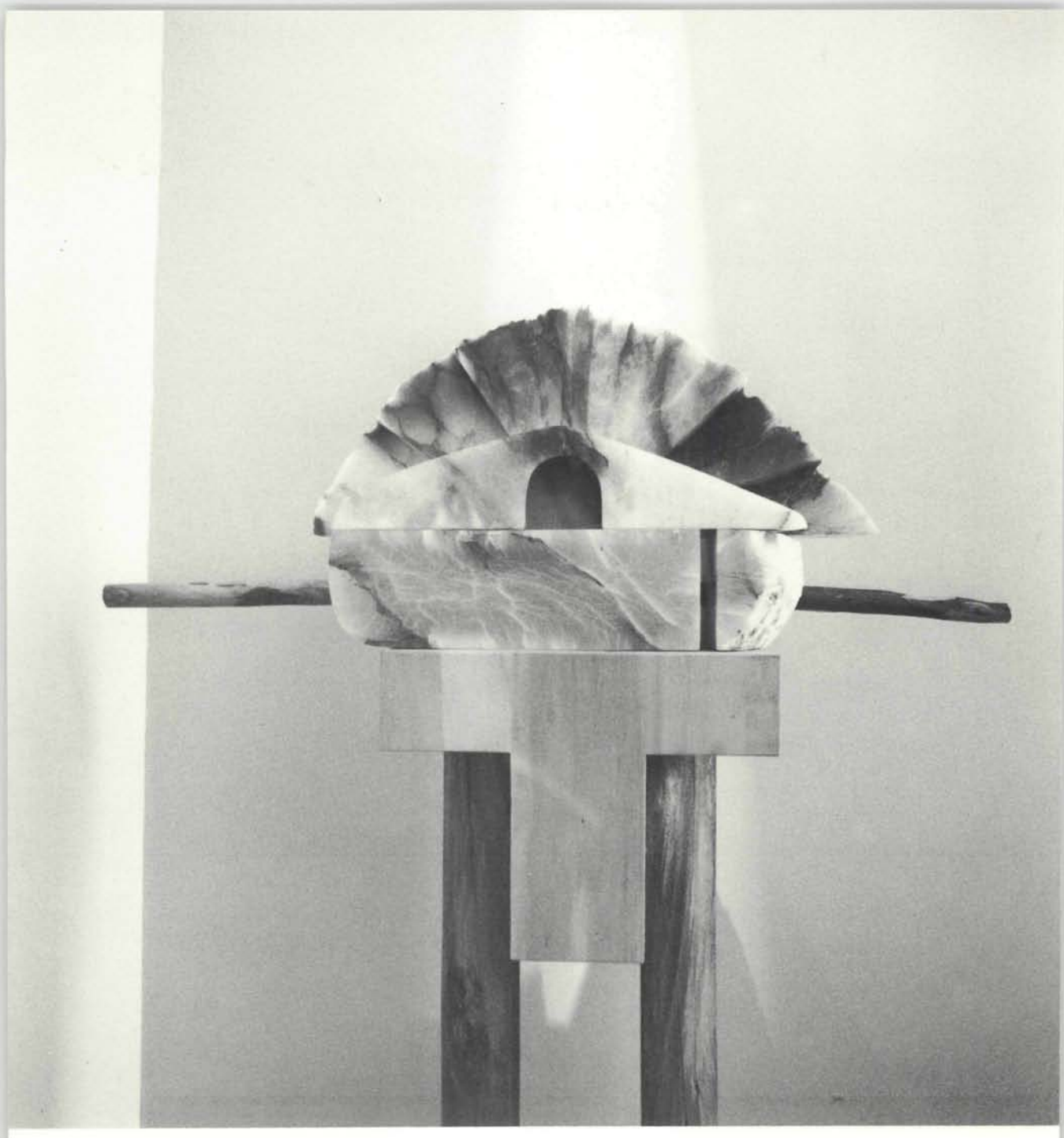
Copyright © 1990 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc.

U.S.A. newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, OH 44870. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of issue date.

Advertising representative: Kate Shanley, 799 Broadway, Room 237, New York, NY 10003. (212) 477-4905.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman and printed by the Eastern Press of New Haven, Connecticut.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Carla Lavatelli • *Little Roof Big Sun*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notes & Comments: March 1990

Refurbishing the rhetoric of revolution

No sooner had Francis Fukuyama announced to the world that, owing to the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, the end of history was now upon us than Professor Pierre Bourdieu of the Collège de France hastened to report that, on the contrary, what the collapse of Communism really means is that history has just begun—again. In a remarkable essay entitled "History Dawns in the East," published in *Liber,* the monthly European supplement to the London *Times Literary Supplement*, Bourdieu hailed events in Eastern Europe for providing us with, of all things, a model of revolution—a model, moreover, that the rest of Europe (meaning, of course, Western capitalist Europe) would do well to follow.

"It is time," he writes, "to take up the revolutionary *élan* that the peoples of the East have injected into the listless history of Europe." Which can only mean that it is not for Prague and Warsaw to emulate London and Paris and Rome, but for London and Paris and Rome to follow the lead of Prague and Warsaw. This, to say the least, is a very novel reading of events in Eastern Europe.

For Pierre Bourdieu, clearly, you cannot have history without revolution, and without revolution history is hardly worth having, anyway. In this interpretation of events and their meaning, it was Stalin who closed the door on history by betraying the revolution, and the downfall of Stalinism in Eastern Europe means that "history did not really stop in Moscow in the 1930s." But who except Pierre Bourdieu, we can only wonder, ever believed that it did? Certainly not the people who suffered under Moscow's tyranny for so many decades. History remained all too real and all too bloody for them, and what they dreamed of was hardly yet another re-enactment of the revolution that brought them so much misery and death.

The real meaning of "History Dawns in the East"—a title so reminiscent of all those earlier announcements of Red dawns promising the joys of revolution—has nothing to do with either the end of history or its beginning. It is to be found, rather, in what on this side of the Atlantic is called political damage control.

The overthrow of Communism in Eastern Europe has dealt a harsh blow to the political myths fostered by the intellectual Left in Western Europe—and, for that matter, in this country, too—and to a way of thinking that glorifies revolution as a political and cultural ideal. It is entirely understandable, therefore, that intellectuals like Pierre Bourdieu, still dreaming the dream of lost utopias, should now want to claim that this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spectacular repudiation of revolution and its consequences is somehow a reaffirmation of the very thing that has been so resoundingly rejected. "What a magnificent celebration of the Revolution of 1789!" writes Pierre Bourdieu of events in Eastern Europe, apparently oblivious to the fact it is only in the comfortable milieu of the Collège de France in Paris, and not in the more difficult world of Warsaw and Prague and East Berlin, that anyone is invoking 1789, not to mention 1917.

Trotting out all the blood-chilling rhetoric of past revolutions—"We must make every effort to ensure that the rigorous use of reason, and hence of language, becomes a political virtue, and the first among political virtues," etc.—Pierre Bourdieu warned against "lapsing into the old rhetoric." But what was this but the refurbished rhetoric of Robespierre adapted to yet another attempt to uphold the ideal of revolution as an alternative to what is contemptuously dismissed as "the soft pillow of economic success"? Our own guess is that events in Eastern Europe have a lot more to do with a yearning for such a "soft pillow" than with revolutionary theories of history.

Presenting politics, not art

For some time now it has been clear that the great works of Western civilization are under assault for being the unfairly privileged impositions of European culture. The latest manifestation of this assault is *An American Dialogue*, a report of the National Task Force on Presenting and Touring the Performing Arts. This slickly produced booklet, paid for by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts, is a definitive statement of the new gospel of what people ought to be seeing and hearing in the name of art. Its chief goal is to appropriate the task of artistic presenting—which makes available travelling music, theater, and dance attractions to local audiences on a short-term basis—for the frankly political purpose of achieving "a profound impact on American society and the changes that are shaping it."

The political message of *An American Dialogue* is especially troubling because, for much of America, locally supported presenters provide the only live artistic performances available. In the increasingly distant past, such presenting was either undertaken for profit, and therefore subject to audience taste, or was part of the high cultural uplift American education once thought to be its public task. But since World War II, the tremendous rise in presenters' costs, fueled largely by an explosion in artist fees, has combined with a huge increase in public funds for nonprofit presenters, many of them in colleges and universities, to render for-profit presenting impossible. Freed from the need to be supported by a paying audience, the way is now open for the use of aesthetic offerings to implement radical social and political agendas.

The new trend, of course, is multicultural. And so, for the authors of *An American Dialogue*, the splendid American record of transmitting high culture is no more than the result of "European immigrant artists . . . [responding] to the need to perform" and "European immigrants [having] brought with them their hunger and demand for European-style performing arts events." The report proudly generalizes this socially based theory: "[M]any Task Force members easily regarded community as the true source of all culture." New times, then, produce new communities, and since the authors of *An American Dialogue* regard "all culture" as a product of the community writ large, it is not surprising that their definition of art is (to say the least) expansive:

> [O]nly in the last two decades have we begun to recognize the breadth of genres, styles, sources, venues, artists, artforms, and expres-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> sions that comprise the performing arts and on which the future of presenting and touring must be predicated. This is in contrast to the established routine that presenting and touring followed for many years, as art was given the stamp of approval in New York and Europe before being disseminated elsewhere.

And so the art requiring dissemination now is the activity of "cultures and people . . . scarred by centuries of violence against them" and whose "histories, and the images and expressions that have grown from them, must be recognized and supported." Those responsible for presenting art must remedy their ignorance of "cultures other than their own, or arts disciplines other than those they already know," and become "educators" whose "first purpose . . . must be to expand the community's awareness of the sources and breadth of American culture." Like the goal of art, the goal of presenting is to be "cultural equity," the acknowledgment that

> every culture has worth and that its worth must be recognized, expressed, presented, and supported . . . . Demographic change is already rewriting the story of community dynamics and institutional responsibility. As power shifts (and it will, despite tremendous resistance), the present economic, political, and cultural stories must be rewritten.

Thus for those presenters who were so carefully chosen to do the bidding of *An American Dialogue*'s funders, art, if it can be said to exist at all, is a matter of the daily life—and the political life at that—of the tribe. The implications of this attitude are clear for us to ponder: where art is forced to go, can life—not the life of the tribe, but the life of the individual—be far behind?

Beyond perfection at the Kimbell

When the Kimbell Art Museum opened its doors in October 1972, it was instantly recognized as an architectural masterpiece, a shining example of late modernist architecture at its most elegant and inviting. Indeed, the Fort Worth, Texas, museum was soon hailed as a curatorial masterpiece as well, so magnificently had Richard Brown, the Kimbell's founding director, realized his ambition of assembling a small collection of art works "of the highest possible aesthetic quality."

Emphasis must be placed on the word "small." Mr. Brown—who served as the museum's director until his death in 1979—understood from the moment plans for the museum began to unfold that the Kimbell's claim to distinction would have to be based on quality, not quantity. And he had understood that for the museum to succeed as he wished, the aesthetic perfection sought for the collection must also be sought for the building erected to house the collection. As he wrote in a pre-architectural statement of June 1966, "a building with such an organic integrity cannot be built in stages, with allowances and adjustments being made for future wings, extensions or added floors. The form of a building should be so complete in its beauty that additions would spoil its form."

Given this aspiration, Mr. Brown would seem to have been exceedingly fortunate in his choice of Louis I. Kahn (who died in 1974) as the architect for the Kimbell. The museum has less than twenty-thousand square feet of exhibition space, yet we can think of no other recent building—certainly no other recent museum building—to which the term "perfect" has been so frequently applied. "Perfect" derives from the Latin word meaning "finished" or "complete"; and so, despite its modest size, the Kimbell had seemed to almost everyone—at least until last summer, when the museum announced plans to add fourteen-thousand-foot galleries to the north and south ends of Kahn's building.

The spate of recent plans for museum-raping in this country—those of the Whit-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ney Museum of American Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum are only the most notorious cases—has made the response to the Kimbell's announcement a familiar litany. There has been the usual outcry from architects, critics, and preservationists; then we have witnessed a stream of elaborate rationales from Edmund P. Pillsbury, the museum's director since 1980, and Romaldo Giurgola, the Australian-based architect commissioned to draw up the plans to expand the museum; and of course we have watched Paul Goldberger, the chief writer on architecture for *The New York Times,* come down on every side of the controversy.

The most recent episode in the debate over the Kimbell took place on January 22, when Messrs. Pillsbury and Giurgola came to plead their case at a crowded and sometimes contentious meeting organized by the Architectural League of New York at the McGraw-Hill auditorium in New York City. Once again, the argument was familiar: the museum did not have enough space. There was not enough space for parking, for eating, for book buying, for educational activities; there was not enough space to keep the permanent collection on view when temporary exhibitions (of which there have been a steadily increasing number at the Kimbell) were mounted.

This last item was obviously the most pressing one, for it is largely by mounting ever grander travelling exhibitions that many ambitious museums seek to gain visibility and distinguish themselves in the public eye today. As it happens, the exhibitions the Kimbell has mounted have been popular and of a consistently exalted quality. But the question is whether the desire for expansion, for greater prominence and media visibility, justifies maiming an acknowledged architectural masterpiece.

Admittedly, Messrs. Pillsbury and Giurgola had a difficult, perhaps an impossible, task. Knowing the reverence in which Kahn's building is held, they had to repeat over and over again that they, too, thought it was a marvelous building, that it possessed "organic unity," in short, that it was perfect. And yet they had to convince the audience that one could almost double the size of the building without compromising its perfection. Mr. Giurgola—an associate of Kahn's in the 1950s and 1960s—aimed to minimize the outrage by mimicking the master, more or less duplicating Kahn's distinctive cycloid vaults in his design for the addition.

But how can one change something so drastically and have it remain the same? During the question period at that meeting in New York, Sue Ann Kahn, the architect's daughter, rose from the audience to declare that Mr. Giurgola's plan looked like "a shopping mall with an underground parking garage" and to warn that "if this proposal were to be carried out, we would never be able to see the building again." Mr. Pillsbury responded with some pique that "the last thing" Louis Kahn would have wanted would be for us to treat his museum as "a bourgeois artifact." We fear that Mr. Pillsbury did not really answer Miss Kahn's objections. A "bourgeois artifact"? Well, yes, we suppose it is. But what sort of artifact, exactly, does the distinguished Mr. Pillsbury believe himself the director of?

Onward and upward with the arts

The clamor over public funding of the arts that erupted last summer when the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., cancelled an exhibition of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe seems to have died down. But the issues raised by that controversy—deep issues about the relation between public patronage and the transmission of cultural values—have by no means been settled. This was brought home to us in January when the Kitchen, a well-known "alternative" arts center in Manhattan, sponsored a series of performances by the "feminist porn activist"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Annie Sprinkle entitled "Annie Sprinkle: Post-Porn Modernist."

Miss Sprinkle's performance at the Kitchen was directed by Emilio Cubeiro, who among other credits is Director of the International Theater of Poetry and Pain. "The ITTPP philosophy is simple," we read in the program notes: "Open the bedroom and bathroom doors. Open them wide." The Kitchen's handout for the performance described Miss Sprinkle (née Ellen Steinberg) as "one of a new group of women who, in a male-dominated field, create their own kind of self-produced pornography." It noted further that she has appeared in over 150 X-rated films and was for several years a prostitute. Today, Miss Sprinkle styles herself a "performance artist." She is also a New Age holistic sex therapist who uses sex for "healing."

We can hardly comment on the efficacy of Miss Sprinkle's sex therapy. Nor is it appropriate to describe the details of her performance in these pages. Indeed, propriety prevents us from even naming all of the pieces. "Pornstistics," "Sex Toys for World Peace," and "Annie's Cervix" are among the more benign titles featured in her performance. But it is clear that events like "Annie Sprinkle: Post-Porn Modernist" at the Kitchen tell us a good deal about the state of "cutting edge" art in this country. They also tell us something about the state of public stewardship of culture. Among the more than thirty sponsors listed in the Kitchen's program were the New York State Council on the Arts, which gave the Kitchen $25,000 for the 1989-90 season, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, which gave them $20,000 in 1989.

In response to our inquiry, the Council issued a statement that its grant to the Kitchen was meant to support only thirty-two of thirty-six planned performances. "The Council purposely did not fund the full series," the statement concluded, "because it believed that the Annie Sprinkle presentation was not of an artistic quality to warrant Council support." Not only does this raise the impolite question of whether other performance events at the Kitchen can be said to be of sufficient artistic quality to merit public support, it also confronts us with an interestingly novel form of evasion. After all, a $25,000 grant for a performance series is presumably $25,000 the Kitchen wouldn't have otherwise had, and if Miss Sprinkle appeared in the series then she must be counted a beneficiary of the grant.

The Kitchen's program notes did not mention the National Endowment for the Arts as a sponsor. But a quick look at the record shows that the NEA approved a total of $325,400 for the Kitchen in 1989. This includes $200,000 "to reduce notes payable and eliminate an accumulated deficit" as well as $60,000 "to support artists' fees and related costs for the 1989-90 presentation season."

Early on in her performance, Miss Sprinkle, lying almost naked on a bed, urged members of the audience to come up to the stage to photograph her in any pose they liked. "Usually I get a lot of money for this," she explained. "But tonight it's government funded."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TATISTCHEFF

NEW YORK

VIRTUOSO

BELLOWS, INGLE, LABODICH, MASSAD

MARCH 3-31

50 WEST 57TH STREET

NEW YORK NY 10019

212 664 0907

LOS ANGELES

STEPHANIE SANCHEZ

PAINTINGS

THROUGH MARCH 24

1547 10TH STREET

SANTA MONICA CA 90401

213 395 8807

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the footsteps of Sade

by Roger Kimball

Is there a pessimism of strength? *An intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence, prompted by well-being, by overflowing, by the* fullness *of existence?*

—Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

On the dust jacket of *Sexual Personae,* which is modestly subtitled "Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson," the well-known literary critic Harold Bloom informs readers that the book they are holding will be "an enormous sensation."[1] Even Professor Bloom must occasionally be right, and it takes only a brief perusal of this long and ambitious first book by his former student to convince one that his prediction will be fulfilled. (Whether he is also correct that the book "compels us to rethink the question of the literary representation of human sexuality" is another question.)

Sexual Personae will be a sensation partly because of its message and subject matter. It is anti-feminist and anti-liberal—things sure to raise hackles—but also disturbingly anti-humanistic and obsessed with sexual exotica. Those acquainted with Professor Bloom's Freudian-inspired theory of literary influence will see much evidence of *his* literary influence in this book; one might, in fact, be tempted to see *Sexual Personae* as an unusually extended illustration of his principle that the most profound reading is creative misreading.

Unlike Professor Bloom, however, Camille Paglia, who is currently an associate professor of the humanities at Philadelphia College of the Performing Arts, is a gifted stylist. She writes sharp, epigrammatic prose—what she would no doubt appreciate being told is *masculine* prose. In large doses, *Sexual Personae*—and Professor Paglia has given us a very large dose here—betrays a self-conscious straining for effect that borders on the melodramatic. This is not surprising, perhaps, in light of Professor Paglia's confession in her preface that her method is "a form of sensationalism." Nonetheless, for a scholarly work, the book possesses unusual literary flair, and this, too, will help make it a sensation.

Professor Paglia's thesis is that man's cultural self-expression—taking the term broadly to embrace everything from ritual and religion to art, fashion, and Hollywood movies—has been a vast panoply of shifting sexual personae that are constructed to deal with the fearsome realities of human existence. She pursues this idea through twenty-four chapters and some seven hundred closely-printed pages. A long introductory manifesto entitled "Sex and Violence, or Nature and Art" sets forth Professor Paglia's grim theory of sexuality and includes *obiter dicta* about politics, capitalism, the teaching of literature, pop culture, and other subjects.

1 *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*, by Camille Paglia; Yale University Press, 718 pages, $35.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her saga proper begins with a discussion of the Venus of Willendorf, a stone cult image ca. 30,000 B.C. (the bust of the Egyptian Queen Nefertiti), and other ancient artifacts. "Hierarchy and eroticism fused in Egypt," we are told, "making a pagan unity the west has never thrown off." *Sexual Personae* follows the thread of this alleged unity through a smorgasbord of Western cultural highlights, concluding with chapters on nineteenth-century American literature.

Along the way, we are invited to contemplate sexual and aggressive obsessions in an astonishing range of likely and unlikely figures including Spenser and Shakespeare, Botticelli and Donatello, Rousseau and the Marquis de Sade, Blake, Shelley, Keats, and Byron, Baudelaire, Huysmans, Swinburne, Pater, and Oscar Wilde. There are some surprising conclusions. For example, Professor Paglia informs us that "*The Faerie Queene* is the most extended and extensive meditation on sex in the history of poetry." She confides that the *Mona Lisa,* "the premiere sexual persona of western art," is the image of a "dominatrix." And she discovers that "literature's most influential male heroine [*sic*] is the protagonist of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.*" Then there is William Blake's poem *The Mental Traveller,* which turns out to be "a Sadean critique of love and sex." Nor has Blake's influence waned, for his poem "has renewed life in one of rock's major lyrics, a song it surely influenced, the Rolling Stones' 'Jumpin' Jack Flash.'" The book ends with a chapter entitled "Amherst's Madame de Sade: Emily Dickinson," in which we are told that "the brutality of this belle of Amherst would stop a truck."

That takes care of the first volume of *Sexual Personae.* A promised second volume "will show how movies, television, sports, and rock music embody all the pagan themes of classical antiquity."

Despite the diversity of topics it treats, there is something unsettlingly monomaniacal about this long book. Professor Paglia's basic presupposition is the familiar idea that there exists an indissoluble opposition between nature and culture. Following Nietzsche, she tends to describe this as an opposition between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. The Dionysian—which, borrowing a term from the Edwardian classicist Jane Harrison, she also calls the chthonic—is that anonymous, primevally generative impulse out of which life endlessly arises and back into which it ineluctably sinks; the Apollonian is the principle of order, individuation, and reason that is responsible for all art, culture, and science.

Professor Paglia identifies the Dionysian with reality, the Apollonian with the compensating artifice, illusion, and ingenuity that enable humanity to thrive in the midst of a hostile or at least indifferent nature. She also identifies the Dionysian as the province of woman, the Apollonian as the province of man. And it is this opposition that gives rise to the drama she proposes to chronicle. As the stage upon which humanity plays out its existence, human sexuality has the unhappy task of nudging these eternally warring principles into some sort of unity.

I say "unhappy" because for Professor Paglia, eroticism is fraught with anxiety, aggression, violence, and other distasteful things. There is not much talk of joy or affection or respect in this book about the representation of sexuality; love is dismissed as a "perverse fascination," necessary to continue the species, perhaps, but ultimately an illusion. Not only does Professor Paglia believe, with Freud and others, that "the element of free will in sex and emotion is slight," she also believes that "a perfectly humane eroticism may be impossible." Most of us might settle for a reasonably humane eroticism. But for Professor Paglia, the dark side of sexuality (she ignores any other) means that "somewhere in every family romance is hostility and aggression, the homicidal wishes of the unconscious."

Moreover, it is precisely this murky realm of eroticism that gives birth to distinctively human personalities, the "personae" that form the subject of this book. Sexual personae find their most imaginative expression in art and literature, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Professor Paglia does not seem to believe that they are mere literary constructs. "I reaffirm and celebrate woman's ancient mystery and glamour. I see the mother as an overwhelming force who condemns men to lifelong sexual anxiety, from which they escape through rationalism and physical achievement."

Professor Paglia is eager to acquaint us with the (largely unpleasant) "facts about chthonian nature." "This book shows," she writes,

> how much in culture goes against our best wishes. Integration of man's body and mind is a profound problem that is not about to be solved by recreational sex or an expansion of women's civil rights. Incarnation, the limitation of mind by matter, is an outrage to imagination. Equally outrageous is gender, which we have not chosen but which nature has imposed upon us. Our physicality is torment . . . . What the west represses in its view of nature is the chthonian . . . the blind grinding of subterranean force, the long slow suck, the murk and ooze. It is the dehumanizing brutality of biology and geology, the Darwinian waste and bloodshed, the squalor and rot we must block from consciousness to retain our Apollonian integrity as persons.

Professor Paglia does not mention Schopenhauer, but her book is saturated with the gloomy, pessimistic view of humanity and nature that characterizes Schopenhauer's philosophy. Yet—again in a way that recalls Schopenhauer's peculiar zeal for pessimism—even as she enthusiastically details the multitudinous ways we are slaves to the uncaring chthonic forces in nature and (especially) in our own nature, Professor Paglia also encourages us to pledge our allegiance to Apollonian order against Dionysian chaos. In this sense, at least, she offers her book as a defense of Western culture against those who would criticize it as patriarchal, rationalistic, domineering, arrogant, and self-centered. Yes, she would reply, Western culture is all those things and more—and that is precisely why it is so valuable. "Most western culture is a distortion of reality," she readily admits. "But reality *should* be distorted."

According to Professor Paglia, women especially should be grateful for the achievements of the West, patriarchy and all. After all, she asks, which system, east or west, has benefited women more? "Western science and industry have freed women from drudgery and danger. Machines do housework. The pill neutralizes fertility. Giving birth is no longer fatal. And the Apollonian line of western rationality has produced the modern aggressive woman who can think like a man and write obnoxious books."

In some respects, Professor Paglia is deeply at odds with the ethos of the academic establishment. Her insistence on the biological basis of differences between the sexes will be counted a rank heresy at a time when the proposition that gender is a "social construction" is touted as gospel in humanities departments from Yale to Stanford. Then, too, the strong anti-feminist streak in her position is certain to spark enormous hostility from an academic establishment almost completely in thrall to feminist ideology. "The very language and logic modern woman uses to assail patriarchal culture were the invention of men," Professor Paglia writes early on in her first chapter—adding for good measure the observation that "all the genres of philosophy, science, high art, athletics, and politics were invented by men."

As a matter of historical record, this is probably true; but admitting it is not the sort of thing calculated to win friends in the academy. Professor Paglia reverts to this impolite idea again and again. Without the male metaphors of concentration and projection, she argues, "woman would long ago have absorbed all creation into herself. There would be no culture, no system, no pyramiding of one hierarchy upon another." More bluntly still: "If civilization had been left in female hands, we would still be living in grass huts." This alone is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

probably grounds for the revocation of tenure.

In a deeper sense, though, *Sexual Personae* appears as the very model of the contemporary academic literary study. Professor Paglia complains that "the amorality, aggression, sadism, voyeurism, and pornography in great art have been ignored or glossed over by most academic critics." But the truth is that the humanities departments of our colleges and universities are obsessed with questions of gender, sex, and power today. If one adds the trusty categories of class and race, it seems that little else is being taught or written about in literature departments. The identification of sex and power ("sex *is* power," Professor Paglia assures us early on in her book) as well as a fascination with the kinkier and more violent domains of sexuality form the chief topic of interest for many academic courses and publications. "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," "Desublimating the Male Sublime: Autoerotics, Anal Erotics, and Corporeal Violence in Melville and William Burroughs": these were among the delightful presentations one could have attended at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in December of 1989. They are no more extreme than much of what appears in *Sexual Personae.*

In the end, we see that Professor Paglia's book belongs to that large and popular genre that specializes in a debunking cynicism. She is at her best when pointing out the limitations of the shallow rationalism that underlies much modern liberalism and progressive social thought. Indeed, she waxes eloquent on the subject. "Modern liberalism suffers unresolved contradictions," she argues.

> It exalts individualism and freedom and, on its radical wing, condemns social orders as oppressive. On the other hand, it expects government to provide materially for all, a feat manageable only by an expansion of authority and a swollen bureaucracy. In other words, liberalism defines government as tyrant father but demands it behave as nurturant mother. Feminism has inherited these contradictions. It sees every hierarchy as repressive, a social fiction; every negative about woman is a male lie designed to keep her in her place. . . .
>
> Sexual freedom, sexual liberation. A modern delusion. We are hierarchical animals. Sweep one hierarchy away, and another will take its place, perhaps less palatable that the first. There are hierarchies in nature and alternative hierarchies in society. In nature, brute force is the law, a survival of the fittest. In society, there are protections for the weak. Society is our frail barrier against nature. When the prestige of state and religion is low, men are free, but they find new ways to enslave themselves, through drugs or depression. My theory is that whenever sexual freedom is sought or achieved, sadomasochism will not be far behind. Romanticism always turns into decadence. Nature is a hard taskmaster. It is the hammer and the anvil, crushing individuality.

But while Professor Paglia is expert at pointing out the contradictions of a too-cheery liberalism, she neglects the contradictions that threaten her own argument. She declares that "civilized life requires a state of illusion." It is clear, however, that she does not regard all illusions as equal. She rails against against the "fog of hopeful sentiment" that she identifies with liberalism, but seems quite willing to accept other, perhaps less attractive, sorts of fog. She cautions us against the shallowness of modern humanism with its optimistic, rose-tinted view of sex, nature, and human relations, but she doesn't mind presenting us with a view that is at least as distorted so long as it is tinted a deeper shade of red.

Sexual Personae is also riddled with overstatements, provocations, and even, alas, absurdities. To employ a term that Professor Paglia borrows from her mentor Harold Bloom and greatly favors, her argument has a tendency to *swerve*—to skid suddenly from the measured to the outrageous, from the reasonable and well supported to the utterly fantastic. On page thirteen, for example, we read that "eroticism *is* mystique; that is, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aura of emotion and imagination around sex." Well, all right. But then a bit further down the page we are told that "physical and spiritual castration is the danger every man runs in intercourse with a woman. Love is the spell by which he puts his sexual fear to sleep. Woman's latent vampirism is not a social aberration but a development of her maternal function, for which nature has equipped her with tiresome thoroughness." Castration? Sexual fear? Vampirism? Not even Professor Paglia's erudition and taut, aphoristic style cannot salvage this (if one may put it so) flaccid Freudian gambit.

It must also be pointed out that behind Professor Paglia's understanding of the opposition between the Apollonian and Dionysian, male and female, thought and body, there is a positively medieval horror of the flesh and organic processes. "We cannot escape our life in these fascist bodies," she declares in one typical passage. The facts of female biology and metabolism seem especially repugnant to her. "Woman's body is a sea acted upon by the month's lunar wave-motion. Sluggish and dormant, her fatty tissues are gorged with water, then suddenly cleansed at hormonal high tide. Edema is our mammalian relapse into the vegetable. . . . Every month for women is a new defeat of the will." In short, "the mature female body [is] . . . a prisoner of gender," she concludes, lamenting especially "edema, water retention, that female curse." One wonders whether the word *edema* has ever occurred more frequently outside the annals of pathology.

Professor Paglia's animus toward nature leads us to what is undoubtedly the most disturbing aspect of *Sexual Personae*: a deep anti-humanism that borders on nihilism. This shows itself most blatantly in Professor Paglia's celebration of the writings of the Marquis de Sade and the link she draws between Sade's teachings and homosexuality. If nature everywhere threatens to enthrall humanity, she reasons, then let humanity defy nature. And who has more thoroughly defied nature than the Marquis de Sade? "Sade detests procreative women," she notes with approval, adding elsewhere that

> I agree with Sade that we have the right to thwart nature's procreative compulsions, through sodomy or abortion. Male homosexuality may be the most valorous of attempts to evade the femme fatal and to defeat nature. By turning away from the Medusan mother, whether in honor or detestation, the male homosexual is one of the great forgers of absolutist western identity.

In fact, Professor Paglia wants to have it both ways. "Happy are those periods when marriage and religion are strong," she writes. "System and order shelter us against sex and nature." But if this is true—and I am convinced that it is true—then those periods under the sway of the Marquis de Sade are unhappy indeed, for Sade provides not for an inoculation against the cruelties of sex and nature but for their exploitation and abasement.

Professor Paglia claims that Sade is "the most unread major writer in western literature." But I am afraid this is untrue on both counts. For the Marquis de Sade is neither unread nor is he a major writer. Already in 1952, in an essay titled "The Vogue of the Marquis de Sade," Edmund Wilson noted that interest in Sade had been "steadily increasing in Europe ever since 1909" to the point where "the subject is in danger of becoming a bore." Nowadays, Sade is all over the academy. You'll find that his writings figure prominently in many college literature courses, academic conferences, and trendy scholarly journals. The influential quarterly *October,* for example, might well be mistaken for Sade's publicity organ, so often and so flatteringly do references to his ideas appear in its pages. And in the new history of French literature that was published by Harvard University Press last year, more pages are devoted to Sade than to Balzac. No, we unfortunately do not have to worry about Sade being an unduly neglected figure.

I say " unfortunately" because the idea that Sade is "a great writer and philosopher," as Professor Paglia assures us, that "no education in the western tradition is complete

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without Sade," is preposterous. Even allowing for her deliberate "sensationalism," I am surprised that so accomplished a writer as she could claim to find anything to admire in his literary style. If one is able to get beyond the graphically rebarbative content of Sade's books—admittedly a large task—one discovers that he is an uncommonly pedestrian and repetitious writer; he depends almost entirely on shocking his readers to hold their interest. And his "philosophy" is hardly more than a virulent atheism combined with a pathological hatred of nature and contempt for humanity. "What is man?" Sade asks. "What difference is there between him and other plants, between him and all the other animals? None, obviously." At bottom, the philosophy of the Marquis de Sade bespeaks a destructive infantile rage at humanity's ultimate impotence and mortality. As Wilson noted, "he tends only toward annihilation." Why should we look to him for instruction?

"To be sexually aroused by something eccentric, insignificant, or disgusting is a victory of imagination," Professor Paglia writes. It is not clear whether she is asserting this as a truth in its own right or merely describing Sade's philosophy. "Remember," she cautions, "these are ideas, not acts." But aren't they? Were they not acts for the grisly Marquis himself? What we should really remember is that Sade spent nearly thirty of his seventy-four years incarcerated, first in prison then in an asylum, precisely for acting out some of the murderous fantasies that are rehearsed in such clinical detail in his books. There is a reason that the Marquis de Sade has given his name to an entire genre of sexual perversion.

It is clear that Professor Paglia wants to see herself as a kind of Nietzschean rebel, bravely facing up to difficult truths about "the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence." But in the end, *Sexual Personae* does not face up to evil and the chthonic powers of life so much as it flirts with them. And that, as Professor Paglia's researches will surely have told her, is a dangerous game.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

David Smith: the sculptor and his drawings

by Karen Wilkin

The sculptor David Smith (1906-1965) always insisted that he "belonged with painters." He probably meant it quite literally. Most of his closest friends and colleagues were painters: in the Twenties and Thirties John Graham, Edgar Levy, and Adolph Gottlieb, and later Jean Xceron, Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, and Kenneth Noland. Smith liked to point out, too, that much of the best modern sculpture had been made by painters, citing works by Degas, Matisse, and Picasso as examples. His own approach derived not from sculpture's traditional heritage of modelling and carving, but from painting, via Cubism's legacy of collage and open planar construction.

Smith's only formal art training was in drawing and painting. When he arrived in New York, in 1926, never having seen anything in Paulding, Ohio, "other than a very, very dark picture with some sheep in it in the public library," Smith knew that he wanted to be a painter and had already made several abortive attempts to learn how to become one. In high school, his cartoons had won him praise, but since Paulding High offered only mechanical drawing, he had subscribed to a correspondence course to try to improve his technique. In college, he spent a miserable year in a program designed to train art teachers, then switched schools the following fall only to discover that his new university had no art department at all. (He lasted two weeks.) In New York, Smith's real education began. On the advice of Dorothy Dehner, the painter and sculptor whom he married in 1927, he enrolled at the Art Students League to study drawing with John Sloan and Kimon Nicolaides. Not long after, Smith joined the painting class of the Czech-born Cubist Jan Matulka, a remarkable teacher whom Smith always acknowledged as a major influence.

His aspirations to be a painter notwithstanding, Smith began to make sculpture, almost in spite of himself. Matulka's teaching encouraged the use of strongly contrasting textures to separate flat, clearly bounded shapes, and Smith's response was to affix objects to his canvases. These exaggerated collages became reliefs of a kind, and, by the early Thirties, free-standing three-dimensional structures. From visual differentiation of forms by means of variations in texture, Smith arrived at visual differentiation of forms by means of physical separation. He described the process in a paper delivered at the Museum of Modern Art's 1952 symposium "The New Sculpture": "The painting developed into raised levels from the canvas. Gradually, the canvas became the base and the painting was a sculpture."

Despite the way his work was evolving during the early Thirties, Smith still appears to have thought of himself as a painter more than anything else. He credited Jean Xceron with having convinced him to focus his efforts on sculpture. In a letter to Xceron

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

written in 1956, Smith reminisced, "Remember May 1935, when we walked down 57th Street after your show . . . how you influenced me to concentrate on sculpture. I'm of course forever glad you did, it's more my energy." By 1938, when Smith's first one-man show was mounted by the East River Gallery, he was chiefly making—and exhibiting—sculpture.

If Smith seems slow to have found his direction, it should be borne in mind that even if he had been interested in making sculpture from the outset, the kind of modernist education that he obtained as a painter was simply not available to sculptors in New York at that time. Nor was much untraditional sculpture exhibited. Few examples of vanguard work were visible, and almost all of them were paintings and drawings. The best information about adventurous sculpture came from photographs in the European art magazines, such as the issues of *Cahiers d'art* that Smith was shown by John Graham, the painter, connoisseur, and private dealer whose frequent trips to Paris provided his American friends with fresh news of European innovations. A copiously illustrated article on Picasso's and Julio González's sculpture inspired Smith to begin using welding techniques to make art—at least, the photographs did; Smith knew no French. He saw his first González sculptures "live" soon after, when Graham brought three works back with him from Paris—the first Gonzálezes in America. They impressed Smith deeply.

It's quite easy to identify the few modernist, inventive sculptures, such as the Gonzálezes, that Smith *was* able to see in his early years. The correspondences between these key works and his own are astonishingly direct, but since equally clear correspondences exist with sources as varied as *Life* magazine photos, Museum of Natural History exhibits, Chinese and Egyptian artifacts, and girlie magazines, it's clear that Smith's appetite was not being fed entirely by the high art he was able to see. To some extent, he was self-taught as a sculptor, forced to make it up as he went along. It's worth remembering that when Smith began to make welded-metal sculptures in 1933—the first made in the U.S., it seems—Picasso and González had been constructing in metal for only five or six years. The kind of sculpture that Smith exhibited in 1938 and eventually became identified with was, in those formative years, as new to the rest of the world as it was to him.

Even after Smith decided to concentrate on sculpture, he continued to regard himself as the type of universal artist who could do anything. Variety—of image, of form, of material—is a hallmark of all of Smith's work, from his earliest pieces to his last. His sculptures range from near-expressionist figurative bronzes to pared-down constructions in stainless steel, from hieratic abstract "totems" to neutral geometry, from eccentric still lifes to oversized wagons—and everything in between. Smith also made jewelry, reliefs, and medallions, and, throughout his career, he continued to draw and paint, often as prodigiously as he worked in any other medium. "I make two hundred color drawings a year," Smith wrote in 1956, "and sometimes paintings . . . but I paint and draw as a sculptor. I have no split identity as I did in 1935."

Smith devoted a great deal of energy to finding ways of fusing painting and sculpture, struggling with his desire to make colored structures that would, in his words, "beat either one." But changing media and disciplines, as opposed to amalgamating them, was a way to recharge himself, physically and intellectually, just as changing the "themes" of the sculptures he made at any given time offered him new stimuli and refreshment. (Smith labelled and presented his work in rationally named and numbered groups—the ten *Tanktotems*, for example, or the eight *Zigs*—but these apparently coherent "series" were often made over several years, concurrently with radically different kinds of sculptures, in turn grouped as yet other series.) He might work all day in his factory-style sculpture studio, then draw in the evening, as though working

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a double shift. On occasion, drawing could even serve as a surrogate for sculpture-making. During World War II, when Smith worked in Schenectady, New York, welding armor plate onto locomotives, he had little time for making art and the industrial materials he habitually used in his sculpture were almost impossible to obtain. He channelled his energy and ideas into dozens of uncharacteristically detailed drawings, unusually complete preparations for sculptures he was able to realize only after 1945. Drawings as specific as these are rare in Smith's oeuvre, but the dialogue between his works on paper and his three-dimensional constructions persists.

When Smith died in an automobile accident at fifty-nine, he left close to seven hundred sculptures, unprecedented metal structures, at once delicate and brutal, playful and fierce, vernacular and sophisticated, that profoundly changed our conception of what sculpture could be and set new standards for American art. He also left hundreds of drawings, paintings on paper, and canvases. The drawings and paper works, especially, constitute an extraordinary body of work that not only illuminates Smith's work in other media, but is often compelling and potent in its own right. There are meticulous preparatory studies, detailed "surrogate" drawings, rapidly executed improvisations, and thoughtful explorations of the permutations of specific themes; there are also records of finished sculptures and fully developed paintings on paper. Despite Smith's steadily growing reputation—a reputation that is at last beginning to equal his achievement—this remarkable body of work remains relatively little known. Clearly, Smith was most inventive as a sculptor, but his drawings merit more attention.

This is not to say that his paintings and drawings have been ignored. In the last decade especially there has been evidence of keen interest in them. The Whitney Museum held a major exhibition of Smith's drawings in 1979, and a more modest, but comprehensive, show travelled the U.S. a few years ago under the auspices of the International Exhibitions Foundation. In 1988, the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, in London, mounted an excellent exhibition of Smith's drawings from the Fifties, while, most recently, the Margo Leavin Gallery, in Los Angeles, organized an ambitious survey of works on paper of the Fifties and Sixties;[1] both shows were accompanied by handsome illustrated catalogues. In addition, drawings and sometimes paintings have occasionally been shown alongside Smith's sculpture.

Smith's early drawings fascinate because they are often unequivocal revelations of the artist's demons, images that would obsess him for the rest of his life—the phallic cannon-birds, the harpy-women, the weapon-figures, and so on. But his drawings from the Fifties on are undoubtedly the most satisfying as *drawings*. Sculptors' drawings are almost always renderings of things conceived of as existing in media that have nothing to do with the physical properties of line or tone on a flat surface. They are depictions of three-dimensional (albeit imaginary) objects; they are not drawings intended to serve as ends in themselves. Smith frequently made such drawings in his early years, using notations on paper as rapid, inexpensive trials of half-formed ideas for sculpture. How these drawings were done, the placement of images on the page, the character of the marks that form these images often seem expedient—necessities to be overcome, nothing more. But after the mid-Fifties, Smith's drawings are quite different. While they are still intimately related to sculptures (both projected and realized), the drawings are self-sufficient pictures, not simply visualizations of objects planned to exist in other materials, in other kinds of space.

Yet the connection with actual sculptures is often very clear. There are numerous black-

1 "David Smith: Works on Paper" was at the Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, from January 6 to February 10, 1990. Eleanor Green wrote the catalogue essay.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and-white drawings, rows of vertical configurations, that explore the same kind of hieratic, stacked imagery as Smith's celebrated *Tanktotems* and *Sentinels*. Others develop the animated, confrontational "figuration" of sculptures such as the Museum of Modern Art's *History of LeRoy Borton* (1956), with its elongated "neck" and three-legged centaur "body," or the Whitney Museum's superb *Running Daughter* (1956-60), with its sprightly stance and kicked-up "leg." These lines of vertical images suggest groups of free-standing sculptures, set side by side, or perhaps it is our knowledge of Smith's sculptures, of his habit of setting his finished works at intervals in the fields near his house at Bolton Landing, in upstate New York, that makes us read them that way. Yet, at the same time, the "figures" in these drawings do not appear wholly buildable. Instead, they are conceived as loosely associated clusters of strokes that recall Oriental ideograms as much as they do potential three-dimensional constructions. In still other drawings, configurations related to single, usually horizontally developed (or less singlemindedly vertical) sculptures, are spread across the page, animating the entire sheet. Touch, the way paint or ink goes down on paper, the physical quality of each stroke, becomes crucial. So does the position of each stroke or group of strokes on the sheet. Voids are not merely background in these drawings. Instead of indeterminate spaces in which future sculptures might be situated, they seem important, lively parts of the whole. In the best of these late drawings, whether or not what has been drawn *could* be realized as sculpture becomes irrelevant; the drawing is telling and provocative in its own right.

Not surprisingly, the changes in Smith's works on paper parallel changes in his sculpture. His works of the Thirties and Forties can roughly be described as translations of fairly specific images (often most specifically rendered on paper, as it turns out) into charged, evocative "glyphs": small, allusive, but ambiguous elements are attached to relatively neutral structures; they are displayed on vertical "scaffolding" or framed and held up or set in protective containers. Around 1949-50, Smith started to make larger and more generously scaled sculpture and, instead of assembling nodes of meaning on a fairly uninflected framework, he began to make every part of the structure equally important and eloquent. It's the difference between *The Letter* (1950, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica), a compact assembly of forged and cast "signs," neatly ranked on horizontal bars, and the exuberant, threatening *Australia* (1951, Museum of Modern Art), a flourish of steel calligraphy perched, insect-like, on spiky "feet" and cantilevered nine feet across. Smith's sculptures after 1950 are no less allusive and no less disturbing than his earlier, more overtly referential work, but they are, on the whole, more abstract and more dependent upon the revealed history of their making for their meaning. As in the drawings, materials themselves begin to count even more; the physical quality of the sculpture counts as much as what it might allude to. Dorothy Dehner has suggested that abstraction appealed to Smith as a way of making use of his deepest feelings without revealing himself completely. His work after about 1950, on paper and in three dimensions, bears out Dehner's observation. It implies, too, that Smith had learned to trust himself more, to believe that the way he put two pieces of metal together or pressed a pool of ink into paper could be expressive, regardless of reference.

Touch, the mark of the hand, turns out to be immensely important to Smith's sculpture, so it is not surprising that it should also prove crucial to the success of his drawings. Smith's sculpture looks worse in photographs than most—which is saying a good deal. His pieces appear to be flat, linear, even monumental. (Smith's own photographs, if anything, exaggerate this effect, so he may have liked it.) Seeing work known only from photographs is always a surprise, but seeing Smith's sculptures is a revelation. They are, in actuality, rather intimate, human in scale. How things abut, how they project into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

space, how they twist and touch one another proves to be extraordinarily delicate and, at the same time, powerful.

Smith liked to present himself with all the macho posturing of his generation: he may have made *art*, but he was a big, regular guy who used the same materials and the same methods as those blue-collar workers who made certifiably male products like trucks and cars. But despite Smith's tough-guy pose, he was obviously acutely sensitive to sculptural nuance, as well as to his materials. He used whatever would produce the forms and textures a particular sculpture demanded. To achieve the contrasts of form and surface he desired, Smith might combine forged and cast elements with found objects, new plate, and rod in a single work. Small wonder that he manifests his pleasure in how changing hand pressure created different kinds of line or tone, in his works on paper.

Good as Smith's drawings often are, it may be that they are most revealing and compelling in direct relation to his sculpture. The connection between works in widely differing media is a curious one; the best drawings do not necessarily relate to the best sculpture, and vice versa. Smith's *Forgings* of 1955 are among his most reductive and least successful sculptures: minimal bars, warped and pinched by blows of a power hammer, set vertically, like stick figures. (They anticipate by thirty years related works made recently by the French sculptor Alain Kirili, but that's another matter.) But if, in relation to Smith's other sculptures of the same period, the *Forgings* seem limited, the series of drawings that relate to them does not. Quite simply, the drawings are ravishing. Smith stacks broad, horizontal bands, layers of fluid strokes whose profiles result from varying amounts of ink on the brush and from subtle alterations of touch. The difference between the drawings and the sculptures helps clarify why the *Forgings*, finally, are not very good. The intimate hand gesture that is reflected directly in the drawings is missing from the sculptures, shaped, as they are, by an impersonal power tool.

The comparison tells us something, too, about Smith's best-known late works, the *Cubis*, made in the 1960s. The most famous of these are stacks of burnished, gleaming stainless-steel boxes. Smith could weld stainless steel—he had learned how in the locomotive factory—but he lacked the equipment to cut the extremely hard material; the boxes and "cushions" from which he assembled the *Cubis* had to be precut and, hence, preconceived. This necessitated a way of working quite unlike Smith's habitual improvisation—and it shows. The best of the *Cubis* are as good as anything Smith ever made, but as a group they are less consistent than his remarkable *Tanktotems*, those alert, poised creatures that balance at the edge of abstraction and uncanny presence, or the urgent, wide-ranging *Voltris*, made when Smith was given the run of an abandoned Italian steel mill, in 1962. In comparison to these and other exceptional sculptures, such as the splendid *Zig IV* (1961, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts), which seems to both loom at the viewer and retreat, the *Cubis* often seem to lack spontaneity, to be rather rigid and cold.

Interestingly, the works on paper that investigate images similar to those in the *Cubis* suffer from similar problems of stiffness and anonymity. In them, Smith, employing stencils, masked out regular geometric shapes—tipped diamonds, rectangles, squares—and sprayed around them to create dense expanses of tone. I suspect that seeing sprayed *Cubi* "paintings" beside the sculptures would be extremely informative and help to clarify just what Smith was after in this problematic series. This spring marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of Smith's tragically early death. Perhaps it is time for a full-scale, comprehensive retrospective, an exhibition that would not only give us a sense of the full range of Smith's sculptural achievement, but of his work in other media, as well. I think he would have liked the idea.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arnold Toynbee and his "nonsense book"

by Elie Kedourie

Professor William H. McNeill wrote *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life* at the request of Lawrence Toynbee, the historian's sole surviving child.[1] He has produced a solid and felicitously written, indeed outstanding work. Mr. McNeill makes abundant and telling use of material from the Toynbee and Gilbert Murray papers as well as other archives. The Toynbee who emerges from his researches is a complicated and peculiar character—and one whose private, intimate, and familial preoccupations, the biographer argues, have a tight connection with his work as a writer and his activities as a public figure.

Arnold Joseph Toynbee was born in 1889. His grandfather was Joseph Toynbee, a well-known London doctor, who died prematurely from exposure to an overdose of chloroform with which he was experimenting. One of his uncles was Arnold Toynbee, who became a fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, and who died at the age of thirty, having during his short life made a great impression upon his elders and contemporaries as someone who, both in his teaching and his practical activities, aspired to bridge the gap between rich and poor. The well-known East End of London settlement, Toynbee Hall, was founded by a group of his admirers. Harry Toynbee, the youngest of Joseph Toynbee's children, who became A. J. Toynbee's father, wished to emulate his elder brother Arnold, and took employment with a private charitable association, the Charity Organization Society, which aimed to help the poor to help themselves. In 1909 Harry Toynbee began to suffer from acute depression, and entered a mental hospital. He remained confined to hospital until his death in 1941.

A. J. Toynbee's mother was the daughter of a Birmingham industrialist whose business failed. She was a very able woman who, most exceptionally, defied convention by going to Cambridge and gaining a First in modern history. Until her son's marriage in 1913 she remained the dominating figure in his life. Arnold, the eldest of three children, and the only son, was, thus, a scion of the English professional and enlightened middle classes, even though his parents' income was exiguous. Much was expected of him and the expectations were not disappointed. In 1902 he gained a scholarship to Winchester College, and when he left in 1907, his career in this, the oldest of the English public schools, had been crowned by a large number of prizes, chiefly in classics, and by the award of a scholarship to Balliol, the prestige of which among Oxford colleges was then at its peak. His Balliol career also became studded with prizes and scholarships which culminated in a First in Greats (i.e., classics). Even before the examination results were announced, Toynbee had been invited to stay on at Balliol as a tutor. In a letter to a friend at

1 *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life*, by William H. McNeill; Oxford University Press, 346 pages, $24.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the time of his appointment he wrote: "The thing I want to see is whether I shall possess any power of influence over these men at Balliol: if one achieved that, one would be like the gods." The men in question were those undergraduates who were expected to mold the public mind and to govern Britain and its empire.

From the start, then, Toynbee's ambition was not simply to pursue the life of scholarship. It was also and perhaps even primarily to guide, influence, and shape public life, the life of politics. This ambition proved to be very strong all through his life. The life of scholarship, we may however judge, is not easily compatible with the life of politics. But though, as will be seen, Toynbee would very quickly immerse himself in public affairs, he was not one to be aware of this incompatibility. On the contrary, throughout his long life he believed that his voluminous writings served a practical, a political purpose: to point a moral, to propagate the right attitude to public affairs, and, during the last decades of his active life, when he had left far behind his early admiration for the ideals of Balliol or for the British Empire, to inculcate beliefs and attitudes conducive to the peace, unity, and salvation of all mankind.

What, however, was the character of his scholarship? Mr. McNeill mentions an essay which Toynbee wrote for a history club while he was an undergraduate. Its subject, "The Mongols in East and West," was "a lengthy political and military narrative, not very well put together," leaving an impression of "ill-digested facts, assembled from the best available sources—which meant modern secondary works." This is what might be expected of the studious, clever, and diligent schoolboy and undergraduate; but the method—and the result—are both the same in his later, mature writings: the numerous volumes of the *Survey of International Affairs* which he began producing for the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in 1925, and pre-eminently so in the book which gave him fame and fortune, *A Study of History*.

As Toynbee himself described it in the autobiographical section in Volume X of *A Study of History*, the method consisted in reading up the particular subject with which he was at the moment concerned, and compiling in a notebook a précis of the books he had consulted, and then writing up the particular section or chapter, basing himself on the "authorities" he had skillfully culled and filleted. The method required great speed and application. Necessarily, however, the writer was never able to rise above his chosen "authorities." He would also very frequently sink below them, since he did not have the necessary knowledge to allow him critically to discriminate between the merits of alternative accounts of, say, Chinese history or Mayan civilization.

The results of Toynbee's scholastic training do not show only in the books for which he is best known. During World War I he first served in a propaganda outfit, and then transferred, in 1917, to the newly formed Political Intelligence Department in the Foreign Office. Here, presumably on the strength of his having travelled in Greece between his graduation in 1911 and taking up his fellowship at Balliol in 1912, and having published an account of Ottoman atrocities against Armenians and a pamphlet entitled *The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks*, he became the Middle Eastern specialist having for his province the Ottoman Empire, Russian Central Asia, and the world of Islam. Toward the end of the war, he was asked to prepare reports on various British "commitments" in the area. He collected all the files available in the Department, diligently read them, and compiled papers which purported to summarize their contents and highlight their conclusions. This exercise was Toynbee's first encounter with transactions which had been long-drawn-out, extremely complex, and, wittingly or not, full of ambiguities. Toynbee's memoranda exhibited lack of firsthand knowledge and familiarity with the characters involved and with the context in which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

negotiations were carried on. In particular, relying on an earlier anonymous précis made in Cairo in 1916 which gave a novel but baseless account of British territorial promises to the Sharif of Mecca, Toynbee's memorandum bluntly declared that the British were committed to include the whole of "Palestine" in the Sharif's domain. The habits and training of the schoolboy persisted in the hardworking official. A more critical scrutiny of his documents might have led Toynbee to express doubts about the Cairo précis on which he had so totally relied. However, to the end of his days he remained persuaded that "Palestine" had been promised, without any qualifications, to the Arabs, but that through Zionist machinations, his memorandum which proved this had been suppressed—an allegation for which there was no foundation at all.

The tradition of classical studies in which Toynbee was trained was one in which, as Mr. McNeill puts it, accuracy and detail were all. As the evidence shows, Toynbee was good on neither, when he moved from the study of classical texts and sources to other subjects. However, soon after he became a classics don, Toynbee seems to have tired of classical studies, and to have aspired to wider subjects. Shortly after his election to the Balliol fellowship he told a friend that he felt classical studies to be "a bit of a Moloch, and I am not going to cast myself into the furnace of his belly without thoughtful consideration," and a month earlier he told the same friend:

> As for Ambition, with a great screaming A, I have got it pretty strong . . . . I want to be a great gigantic historian—not for fame but because there is lots of work in the world to be done, and I am greedy for as big a share of it as I can get.

Here we find an early sign of the impulse which led him to embark on *A Study of History*, his Nonsense Book, as his first wife used to call it.

Though his own inclinations as well as circumstances quickly led Toynbee to abandon classical studies, the histories of Rome and Greece which as schoolboy and undergraduate he had studied in detail nonetheless left their unmistakable imprint on Toynbee's historical enterprise. Just as the pressure of the internal and external proletariats encompassed the doom of the Roman Empire, so all other imperial dominations had to be destroyed by their own internal and external proletariats—therefore such proletariats had to be identified in the case of other civilizations. Again, just as the Greek city-states brought about their own destruction by their internecine and savage rivalries, so rivalries between states bring about the breakdowns of other civilizations—and specifically of the Western civilization which lay around him in shambles after the Great War.

If we attend to an illuminating suggestion by Mr. McNeill we may go even further. Mr. McNeill draws our attention to a book which the Cambridge classicist F. M. Cornford published in Toynbee's first undergraduate year. In this book, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, Cornford argued that late in life Thucydides had revised his view of public events by coming to regard Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War as retribution for its overweening pride, its *hubris*. Athens for Thucydides was a tragic hero, destined, like such heroes, to suffer punishment for acts of *hubris*, "whether because of the nature of things, or because the gods really were jealous of human greatness." Mr. McNeill is careful to say that Toynbee never acknowledged Cornford's interpretation of Thucydides as influencing his own outlook, but the moralistic tone of Toynbee's historical discourse would lend much credence to McNeill's guess that it had. In a lecture on "The Tragedy of Greece" which he gave in 1920, Toynbee declared that the great tragedies of history might, if correctly analyzed, all reveal the same plot, and that "When Ancient Greek civilisation may be said finally to have dissolved, our own civilisation was ready to 'shoot up and thrive' and repeat the tragedy of mankind."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This endless repetition of *hubris*, retribution, and downfall is essentially the story recounted in *A Study of History*, a recurring story of birth, expansion, empire, universal religion followed by an interregnum. This monotonous rhythm makes the title which Toynbee chose for his work a paradox, since whatever is to happen has already been foreordained, and its outcome settled in advance. It also accounts for Toynbee's preoccupation with comparison: here are so many specimens to be pored over in the hopes of establishing a scientific etiology and pathology of the disease which is civilization.

In 1912 when Toynbee took up his appointment at Balliol all this was in the future and in no way to be predicted. The eight years which followed were to see many far-reaching changes in Toynbee's life. By 1920 the somewhat conventional young man who, by his own exertions, had "made it" both academically and socially, was beginning to develop a quirky complexity which, almost until his death in 1975, continued to flourish and luxuriate. In 1913 he had married Rosalind, eldest child of Gilbert Murray and granddaughter of the Countess of Carlisle. Shortly before his marriage, his future father-in-law described him to Bertrand Russell as a "radical and, as far as I can make out, a quite satisfactory freethinker with no nonsense about the Absolute." Murray was Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford. He and his wife, Lady Mary, held open house for promising undergraduates and Toynbee became a habitual visitor, and got to know Rosalind. Murray's mother-in-law had inherited from her husband a vast estate which included Castle Howard, in Toynbee's words "a great and marvellous place, early 18th century style on the vast scale, with pictures and lakes and statues and libraries and all manner of things." Lady Carlisle, herself a Stanley, and thus by descent member of an ancient aristocratic family, was president of the British Women's Temperance Association and of the Women's National Liberal Foundation. She was also deeply committed to Women's Suffrage and Irish Home Rule, even at the cost of marital harmony.

Toward the end of his life Toynbee told one of Gilbert Murray's biographers that Murray "married Lady Mary, not only as herself, but also as a member of Lady Carlisle's 'establishment.'" We would not be greatly in error if we took these words to apply to Toynbee's own marriage to Rosalind Murray. Less than a year after the wedding, war broke out. Like her grandmother, the Countess, Rosalind disapproved of the British decision to enter it. She also was not at all willing that her husband should enlist, and the Castle Howard view made it appear more or less moral for Toynbee not to do so. He did offer himself to the army, but he was armed with a medical certificate declaring that a dysentery he had contracted on his Greek travels made him unfit for military service, and so "Rosalind's imperious and self-indulgent will prevailed."

Mr. McNeill considers that the dysentery had gone by 1914 and would have been no bar to military service. Toynbee was thus now burdened with a feeling of guilt, a secret shame that he was "avoiding self-sacrifice in order to indulge sexual appetites." Mr. McNeill believes that Toynbee was haunted throughout the war, and his later life as well, by the secret he had to hide, namely that he had failed "to live up to the heroic ideal he took so seriously," and that this secret guilt colored his later political views and attitudes. In Mr. McNeill's interpretation, Toynbee's sense of guilt made him very anxious to do his bit toward the establishment of a more equitable international order. Mr. McNeill's interpretation is much strengthened by telling passages which occur in letters of November and December 1914 to his mother, quoted in a notable paper by Professor Gordon Martel on "The Origins of the Chatham House Version" (Edward Ingram, editor, *National and International Politics in the Middle East*, 1986). In one letter Toynbee exclaims: "when there is all this going on why am I not in it?" Another letter records how distraught he became when one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of his closest friends was killed, and he wished only to go out and get killed too. It was thus supremely important for Toynbee to have a personal and tangible role in the making of peace. To this end he composed a large volume on *Nationality and the War*, published in 1915. After its publication, he accepted a post in an official propaganda outfit in London, the College relieving him of his duties for the time being, but continuing to pay his stipend. However, a few months afterward, in December 1915, Toynbee decided to resign his fellowship. This marked the end of his career as an academic teacher of the classics, and with the exception of his tenure of the Koraes Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History at King's College, London, between 1919 and 1924 which ended with his resignation, Toynbee was never again to occupy a university post in the usual sense of the word.

Toynbee's move is perhaps explained by his desire to break out of what he may have come to see as a narrow and confining occupation, to emulate Lord Bryce, with whom he had much to do when preparing the book on Ottoman atrocities. Bryce was a kindred spirit who professed the same high-minded and strait-laced Liberalism as the Countess of Carlisle, the Murrays, and Arnold and his wife. He combined historical scholarship with the life of politics, at one time serving as British Ambassador to the United States. Also, Rosalind, who was close to her grandmother, had hopes of inheriting Castle Howard from her, and it may be that he was tempted by the prospect, which such an inheritance would make possible, of a career such as Edward Gibbon's—that of a gentleman of leisure who was also a great historian. There was also probably reluctance to return to Balliol and being continuously reminded by the spectacle of the returning veterans of his own behavior during the war.

But Castle Howard was as yet no more than an expectation and a dream. In the meantime Toynbee had to depend on the Countess's bounty, who made him an allowance of £250 a year. His mother, to whom his marriage had come as something of a shock, tantamount to abandonment by her only son whose academic achievements had given her solace and pride in the midst of domestic troubles and stringencies, now disapproved strongly of his resignation and the financial dependence on his wife's family which this entailed. His ties to her were weakened and he became that much closer to the Howard-Murray connection. Toynbee was to find financial dependence on the Countess and her whims constraining and humiliating, but he had to accept the bounty since Rosalind had a cavalier attitude toward money, and he could not cope with her expenditure out of his own earned income, even though he tried to increase it by taking on any and every journalistic assignment coming his way. His worries about money no doubt originated in the difficult circumstances in which he grew up; Rosalind's demands exacerbated an existing insecurity which grew with age, even though the publishing success of *A Study of History* after 1945 and the large fees which he came to command as a lecturer in the United States, Japan, and elsewhere made him a wealthy man. But the older and more prosperous he grew, the more he betrayed, as his biographer remarks, "an unbecoming and almost hysterical grasp after money that he did not really need—behavior starkly in contradiction to his public denunciations of greed and frequent praise of St. Francis' moral example."

In the event, Castle Howard did not come to Rosalind, the Countess having violently quarreled with her and her husband in 1919 over their support for the Labour Party. She even refused to invite them to stay at Castle Howard, writing at one point: "And after all what have you to do with Castle Howard? . . . Is it not anathema to your comrades? Then why come here?" The extent of the Toynbees' dependence on the Countess may be seen from Toynbee's humble—and humiliating—response to their fall from favor. He wrote: "As in your present letter you do not answer yes, you still do not say no, I am going to hazard being importunate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and to ask again." In the end not only did Rosalind not inherit Castle Howard, but her grandmother did not even leave her a private income.

Toynbee's relationship with Rosalind turned out not to be an easy one. Their characters proved to be incompatible. She was masterful, but in her willfulness paradoxically desired a lover and husband who would not disappoint her demand for a strong hero, who would not be submissive to her. In 1942 she was living in London and he in Oxford. At one of their occasional meetings, she taunted him with staying in Oxford because he was afraid of the blitz, and thus with being a coward. Given his behavior in the First World War—which she herself had encouraged—the insult must have been extremely wounding. The marriage came under great stress in the 1930s and eventually broke down. Rosalind had proposed in 1913 "to dispense with the rituals of legal marriage" but eventually agreed to a ceremony in a register office. Now, in the Thirties, she embraced Christianity, first becoming an Anglican and then a Roman Catholic. And in 1939 she published *The Good Pagan's Failure*, an attack on her father's (and her husband's) agnostic and rationalist pieties. Shortly after the outbreak of war, she left Toynbee and took as her lover an American Dominican, fifteen years younger, with whom she continued to live until her death in 1967. Toynbee himself married in 1946 his assistant Veronica Boulter, who supported and cared for him until his death. But this relationship of course could not have the glamour and glitter which enhaloed Rosalind and the Howard connection.

After 1915, then, Toynbee was to become engaged with public affairs, and at times wholly immersed in them. The engagement with public issues was, as has been seen, profoundly connected with, not to say influenced by, his private and intimate affairs and preoccupations. This much the biography makes clear. The tone adopted by the public persona, though it seemed largely familiar and acceptable to the *bien-pensants* of the English-speaking world, was to become over the decades increasingly strident and dogmatic, while the utterances, very often vatic and admonitory, became more and more peculiar and eccentric. He began by being, as Gordon Martel puts it, a Wilsonian before Wilson, writing to his mother in November 1914 that "the veiled war of diplomacy is the root of all evil, and democracy all over Europe has got to conquer the domain of foreign policy as well as home affairs." *Nationality and the War*, his first opus, advocated redrawing the map of Europe and the Near East on the principles of national self-determination. *Inter alia*, this required partitioning the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with Austria and Bohemia uniting with Germany. The principle of nationality might also require that portions of Alsace and Lorraine, and of Polish lands, should also be joined to Germany. If this were done Germany would of course become the strongest Power on the continent, but a generous settlement would convert the Germans and their neighbors from national competition to national cooperation. This was all the more necessary because of the Yellow Peril which will be "the fundamental factor of world politics in the next century." To keep this menace at bay, Canada, the United States, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand, and possibly Japan will join together, and "Russia will actually be the chief promoter of this defensive entente." Adequate defense against the Yellow Peril will, however, also require the cooperation of a rejuvenated, enlarged, and powerful Germany. Toynbee's biographer judiciously remarks that *Nationality and the War*, in its concern for international politics, and its "(often excessive) readiness to foresee a future radically at odds with present circumstances remained characteristic of his mind throughout his life," and was thus "quite in line with his later work," foreshadowing the annual surveys of international affairs which he produced between 1925 and 1939.

Toynbee's ideas about national self-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

determination persisted after he had joined the Foreign Office and became even more extreme. Thus he wrote in a letter to his mother: "I am for nationality at one end and internationalism at the other, as essential parts of reconstruction, and if existing states and their traditions cannot square with them, let them go to the devil, the United Kingdom and the Dual Monarchy and all of them." He made no bones about giving voice to the extreme radicalism to which he was increasingly inclined. In the same letter to his mother, he also said: "The middle classes have had their fling for a century and produced this [war]; now let the working classes have their fling." Virginia Woolf has also left an account of the opinions to which he was giving utterance in January 1918. "Arnold," she recorded in her diary, "outdid me in anti-nationalism, anti-patriotism, and anti-militarism . . . . I like her [Rosalind] better than Arnold, who improves though, and is evidently harmless, and much in his element when discussing Oxford. He hasn't *much good to say of it and will never go back* . . . . He knew the aristocratic heroes who are now all killed and celebrated, and loathed them."

During his time in the Political Intelligence Department he discovered yet another peril, comparable to the Yellow Peril. What he now feared was a confrontation between the Islamic world and the British Empire:

> It is submitted [he wrote in a memorandum of January 1918] that revolutionary Russia . . . and politically conscious Islam are the two main factors in the situation, and that if our policy is not based on an entente with these, the whole land bridge [between Europe and Asia] is bound to pass out of our influence and come ultimately under some form of German control.
>
> An entente with both is all the more necessary if, as was suggested in a previous section of this Memorandum, Bolshevism and the Moslem Movement are gravitating towards one another.

There was, and there could be, no evidence for Toynbee's assertions. What was "the Moslem Movement," and how could the mutual gravitation between it and Bolshevism be discovered? And even if a "Moslem Movement" was identifiable, in what way could the Foreign Office achieve an entente with it, not to mention the other entente, that with Lenin, which Toynbee was also so confidently advocating? Not only were these visionary and cloudy notions an utter waste of time for those who had to formulate and execute a policy, but also the notions themselves were subject to alarming, unpredictable lurches. After the Armistice, he went to Paris as a member of the British delegation to the Peace Conference and there, together with Harold Nicolson, a junior member of the Foreign Office, concocted yet another proposal, namely the "drastic idea" of giving to Greece Istanbul and the European shores of the Straits and the Sea of Marmara, and confining Turkey to Anatolia. We can easily imagine how the "Moslem Movement" would have welcomed the idea of wresting a great city from the *domain of Islam and presenting it to* unbelievers who, not so long ago, had been the Sultan's subjects. In order to prevent this catastrophic collision between Islam and the British Empire, Toynbee also became a crusader against the "secret treaties" which, as Gordon Martel puts it, "he believed would deliver the people of the Middle East into the hands of the imperialists and forestall their development into progressive, self-reliant societies." In the words of Lord Robert Cecil, then a junior Minister of the Foreign Office, Toynbee had come to adopt "the views of Colonel Lawrence and his friends," arguing as though the treaty of London, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne did not exist.

As may be seen, then, Toynbee's political judgment attained heights of absurdity. On the one hand, he operated with large, global notions spanning the centuries. But the presbyopia was accompanied by a severe myopia: he failed to see what was staring him in the face. He was shattered by the British and French failure to enforce sanctions

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against Mussolini over Abyssinia. He did not even consider that League of Nations sanctions would be inefficacious in preventing Mussolini from invading Abyssinia, or that there might be something to be said for the policy which the British and French were seeking to follow, that it might be an attempt—feeble, no doubt—to establish some kind of balance among the European Powers in the face of a resurgent Germany. For him it was a simple, open-and-shut case in which morality dictated one and only one policy. As for Nazi Germany, for the greater part of the 1930s he simply failed to understand the character of this regime or suspect Hitler's designs and ambitions.

His first reaction to Hitler's coming to power was to propose to Gilbert Murray, on February 20, 1933, that the League of Nations Union, of which his father-in-law was the leading spirit, should propose German-Polish boundary revisions. He visited Germany in 1934 and met Alfred Rosenberg, after which he reported that he felt "less alarmed about the foreign policy of the Nazi regime . . . than I had been before." He returned to Germany in 1936, on the invitation of a confidant of Ribbentrop's to address academic audiences in various cities. In one lecture he declared, in piacular tones, that "We in England are beginning to think very hard about possible ways and means of arriving at some peaceful adjustment between 'have-nots' and 'haves'—of whom we are the chief." He was also received by Hitler for two hours. When he came back he wrote a memorandum for the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary in which he affirmed that Hitler wanted the former German colonies in Africa returned, but had no ambition to conquer Europe. He had, he said, "the very strong conviction" that Hitler desired British friendship and that he was "quite sincere" in what he said. Toynbee therefore believed that "any response" from the British would produce "an enormous counter-response" from Hitler. When, however, shortly afterward the Nazis marched into the Rhineland, Toynbee raised his telescope to the far horizon, forecasting the imminence of a new world empire. "Personally," he wrote to a friend, "I am inclined to think that the Germans rather than the Russians will play the Roman part, and it is not inconceivable that England and France may accept this greatest of all *faits accomplis* without making another world war about it." In 1938, he came to believe that what Munich had accomplished was that the principle of national self-determination "has now at last been applied equally for the benefit of the nations that happened to be on the losing side in 1919-1921." The application of this principle, he declared in a paper, "After Munich," which Chatham House refused to publish, would produce "a Mitteleuropa under German hegemony," to which further resistance was impossible: France and Great Britain had now passed up their "last chance at remaining Great Powers." The world, he wrote to a correspondent a year later, after the outbreak of the war, "is in such desperate need of political unification . . . that it is worth paying the price of falling under the worst tyranny": surrender to Hitler might have to be accepted.

The defeatist impulse, as it must be called, was very strong in Toynbee. In the 1930s he was all for satisfying Hitler's wishes. On the outbreak of war, he was ready to envisage a Nazi-dominated Europe as the herald of a new world order in which "parochial states" would have disappeared. But when it became clear that the Nazis were being defeated, his world-historical speculations took another turn. In June 1944 he told his father-in-law that "we may move on to a final round between the United States and the Soviet Union. If it comes, I expect," he prophesied, "the Americans will be the aggressors . . . but that the Russians will win." And why? Because "they have a more serious purpose in life and command a far larger mass of manpower, territory, and resources." If war between these two Powers should erupt, he wrote in the following October, Europe should "stay out of the mêlée." His belief in the attractions of Soviet Communism endured. The readers of *Playboy* magazine

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were privileged to learn from an interview with him in 1967 that the United States was "the leader of a worldwide counter-revolutionary movement in defense of vested interests," that "Madison Avenue is more of a danger to the West than Communism," and that Communism had more to offer Latin America than anything the United States could provide. A few years earlier, like any Marcher against the Bomb, he was telling a friend, Better Red than Dead: no other alternative seems to have occurred to the seer.

This Sage was a product, indeed a fine flower, of English education at the beginning of the century. One cannot but wonder whether there was something in the education itself, whether at Winchester or Oxford, which might have planted in him the seeds of the disaffection toward his country, and toward the civilization in which he was reared, which began to manifest itself during and immediately after the war; or whether, as his biographer is inclined to think, he was rationalizing his guilt at having shirked military service after 1914 by making both his own country and European civilization guilty of war and aggression, so that he would be absolved in his own eyes. That there was a change after 1914 seems clear. At the end of his tour of Greece in the summer of 1912, he was writing to his mother that he thought "the greatest result of this year has been to make me appreciate the value of England (or rather of the small group of countries . . . which can be called civilised). We are very small and very precious." But in 1930, responding to comments from Gilbert Murray on the first part of *A Study of History*, which he had sent him in manuscript, he wrote:

> I am conscious of having a certain "down" on Western civilisation and have often tried to think out why I have it, in order to get it into proportion. I expect it is largely personal "uncorporateness," which makes me rather hostile, in the same sort of way, to Winchester and Balliol and the British empire; partly it is the effect of the War, which for anyone of my age, is bound to seem the chief expression of Western civilisation, so far, in one's own lifetime, and partly it is the effect of a classical education. I think I have a tinge of the Renaissance feeling that the Ancient World is the real home of the human spirit, and that what came after is rather a pity—like dog latin.

This passage is extremely suggestive, not to say illuminating: a classical education, Winchester and Balliol, the Great War, all had their part to play in the fashioning of Toynbee's guilt-ridden rebellious radicalism which stayed with him all his life, which indeed grew with the passage of the years. Twenty-two years after the letter just quoted, another letter told his father-in-law that "Western imperialism, not Russian Communism is Enemy no. 1 for the majority of the human race." As is well-known, his BBC 1952 Reith lectures, published under the title *The World and the West*, are the most notorious public expression of Toynbee's dislike, not to say hatred, of the West, which he denounced as a perpetual and ruthless aggressor.

Toynbee's career posed another puzzle which concerns not so much himself as the society in which he came to occupy a central position as an opinion-maker with an influence both deep and tentacular. It also concerns the department of state which in two world wars made use of his services, and proposed to reward him by offering to make him Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George—an offer which he declined on the ground that the knighthood "would be a complication in carrying on my present work" and would affect his relation with other nationalities—as though the knighthood was not an honor but a shameful stigma. It might however be said that when Toynbee was working for the Political Intelligence Department from 1917, his disaffection to British institutions was not known, and that there were many like him in the Foreign Office and elsewhere in Whitehall who were thought to be harmless

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

liberals and progressives, all in favor of Wilsonian principles, the League of Nations, and the rest of it. Also, that his flirtation with the Labour Party and his arguments about the necessity of establishing an entente with the Bolsheviks probably prevented an offer of permanent employment in the Foreign Office.

Toynbee was introduced to the newly formed British Institute of International Affairs (later to be generally known as Chatham House) by his former superior in the Political Intelligence Department, J. W. Headlam-Morley, who, after the war, joined the Foreign Office on a permanent basis and became its Historical Adviser. Toynbee was engaged to write a Survey of International Affairs, in continuation of a six-volume work on the History of the Peace Conference which the Institute had earlier commissioned. The following year, having accomplished his task to their satisfaction, the Institute appointed him on a permanent basis as Director of Studies, a post which Toynbee held until his retirement in 1955. Chatham House was, in its heyday, extremely influential since it operated at the center of a worldwide empire and served as a meeting-place for journalists, academics, and officials. The annual Surveys of International Affairs which Toynbee wrote and edited attained a quasi-official status. Thus, between the wars and for some time afterward Chatham House served as a base and a sounding-board from which Toynbee and his associates could disseminate their views among politicians, officials, and opinion-makers. What these were may be gathered from the brief review of his opinions above. These notions—high-minded and moralistic, claiming that the League of Nations and national self-determination embodied eternal verities, absolutely sure of the direction history was taking—had sufficient uniformity and continuity for them to constitute what, in the words of the title of a book of mine published in 1970, can be called the Chatham House Version. This appellation, however, agitated Toynbee and made him extremely angry, as may be seen from his private papers, and from a review of the book in the periodical *The Round Table*, which appeared in 1970.

When war broke out in 1939, Chatham House came to an agreement with the Foreign Office to establish a Foreign Research and Press Service. The Chatham House Staff and their press clippings moved to Balliol College, with the remit of providing accurate information on foreign issues to government departments on demand. The Government provided eighty percent of the initial budget, with Chatham House and Oxford University contributing the rest in the form of salaries for dons joining the FRPS and for Toynbee and some of his helpers. But of course it could not be simply a matter of providing information. Toynbee's views and inclinations, and the opinions emanating from Chatham House, should by now have been well-known. And as might have been expected, the staff of the FRPS had their own pet ideas which they tried to press on the administration. For instance, Professor H.A.R. Gibb, a Professor of Arabic at Oxford and an old Chatham House associate, made himself the fervent and indefatigable advocate of Arab unity. Gibb's pro-Arabism inspired many followers in the FRPS, and later on in the Cairo Group of Chatham House, at Oxford, and in the United States where he became a professor at Harvard. Toward the end of the war, in 1944, Gibbs's pro-Arabism became laced with pro-Sovietism. He declared that if the British were to "fail" the Arabs, the alternative had to be "Russian leadership": the USSR had an "invaluable contribution to make towards the solution of some difficult problems in Asia," and it would be "in the real and best interests of the Middle East and," he categorically and confidently asserted, "of the world" that the Soviets should take over from the British in this region. Toynbee himself propounded "the liquidation of imperialism" and beat the drum of world government as the sovereign remedy against war. The Foreign Office must have thought all this progressive, anti-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imperial rope well worth the £60,000 to £70,000 a year it cost to maintain the FRPS since, as has been seen, it wished, in addition, to reward Toynbee with a KCMG.

When Toynbee went to Greece in 1911-12, he was much offended by the manners and behavior of the modern Greeks. His dislike found expression in his use of the term "dago." In the letter written to his mother from Greece in the summer of 1912, quoted above, after having expressed his appreciation of England and the civilization of which it formed a part, he went on to say that he now also appreciated "the soundness of race prejudice." "I would like," the letter continued, "to study the dago deeply, but one would have to see South America and Sicily first." Essentially "dagodom" was the outcome of contact with Europe, and the unsuccessful imitation of it. "But," the young Toynbee declared, "no Mohammedans are dagos: there is something in their religion which saves them from imitativeness." What Toynbee called "dagodom" is what fellow romantics condemned as Levantivism, but as Sir Mark Sykes (who was travelling in the Near East in the same decade as Toynbee and was a firm believer in the degraded nature of the Levantine) would have explained to him with many examples recounted in his books, Muslims were by no means immune from Toynbee's strictures on "dagodom." Here in this talk about "dagos" we find an early formulation of a key idea in *A Study of History*, namely that contact between civilizations is bound to have disagreeable consequences for both sides: shoddiness and superficiality in those who receive an alien civilization, and eventually *pammixia* and cultural degradation for the civilization which has thus attracted foreign imitators who then proceed to invade its vital center like a cancer, as anyone may see for himself who consults the telephone directories of London, New York, or Chicago. But this key idea is in reality untenable as must appear from even a brief consideration of the loyalty which a great variety of peoples felt toward Hellenism and *romanitas*, or toward Islamic civilization, or of the assimilation of the English language and English political and legal institutions and ideas by the heterogeneous multitudes who have now become the United States of America.

In his later, ecumenical, *persona* Toynbee would have at all costs avoided any talk of "dagodom," but with one exception, namely the Jews.

> While it is wrong to call him anti-Semitic [Mr. McNeill writes], it remains true that Toynbee was profoundly unsympathetic to Judaism and to Jews. As a child he learned to associate the poor immigrant Jews of London with sharp commercial practice, and his early Christian indoctrination branded the Jews as stubbornly proud for refusing to accept the truth of the Gospel.

This attitude to Jews as quintessential "dagos" manifested itself in private and in public. Mr. McNeill records a bizarre episode when, on a visit to the Far East in 1929, Toynbee met and briefly travelled with the economic historian Professor Eileen Power, who was handsome, stylish, and endowed with a lively mind. Toynbee felt a very strong sexual attraction to her, and became very agitated when she confided to him that she was going to marry Michael Postan, a fellow historian. The news upset Toynbee "firstly because he probably felt that Postan, a Jew from Eastern Europe and almost a head shorter than she, was an improper match." After a sleepless night, Toynbee burst into her room to implore her not to marry Postan and to declare his love for her. Miss Power asked him to leave, which he did.

Both in his private papers and in his published writings the Jews are the only group whom Toynbee treated in a dismissive, and a cuttingly censorious, manner. In *A Study of History* the Jews, as is well-known, are described as the fossil of a civilization, the Syriac, which he had to invent in order to save the harmonious symmetry of his historical scheme. In its later volumes, which were published after the 1948 war, when the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jews of Palestine fought against Arab forces seeking to prevent the establishment of the state of Israel, Toynbee equated these Jews with the Nazis who had murdered six million of their fellow Jews, because he held them responsible for making so many Palestinian Arabs refugees. Indeed, he went much further, ascribing the intolerance and violence of the West to the "Judaic" strain inherited from this fossil. When in October 1973 Israel was attacked by Egypt and Syria he went so far as to write to the Syrian minister of defense: "I send you my heartfelt wishes for an Arab victory."

By the time he came to write Volume XII of *A Study of History*, the volume entitled *Reconsiderations* which was published in 1961, Toynbee had been able to acquaint himself with the rudiments of Jewish history after the Biblical era. He also felt obliged to attend to the vehement criticisms to which many writers and scholars, mainly but not entirely Jewish, had subjected his views on the Jews and Judaism. He now therefore executed a somersault: the Jews were not a fossil; on the contrary, Jewish communities, spread worldwide, represented the wave of the future; all peoples would abandon territorial attachments and, by the logic of the modern worldwide economy, would form communities scattered all over the globe. The somersault, however, landed Toynbee in exactly the same place he had been occupying. In the same hectoring tones as hitherto, he commanded the Jews to be aware of the "great spiritual treasure" which, from reading R. T. Herford's book on the Pharisees, he now discovered that they possessed. This treasure the Jews have no right to keep to themselves; they must, in a great effort of socialist redistribution of spiritual capital, share it with everyone. The Jews, in short, must "defossilize and denationalize" Judaism:

> They will have to give up [he lays down in *Reconsiderations*] the national form of the Jewish community's distinctive identity in order to become, without reservations, the missionaries of a universal church that will be open, on an equal footing, to anyone, Jew or gentile, who gives his allegiance to Deutero-Isaiah's God and seeks to do His will.

The coquettish reference to Deutero-Isaiah notwithstanding, all this is both incoherent and impertinent. There is no reason to believe that sharing a "great spiritual treasure" requires its possessors to divest themselves of their identity. Had Toynbee attended to the discourse of "Deutero-Isaiah" he would have quickly seen that the prophet's strictures and exhortations were addressed not to abstract individuals but to a community bound, as such, to God by a covenant. It is also puzzling why Toynbee singled out Zionism among nationalist movements as especially heinous. Zionism, in fact, shares the same intellectual origins, the same ideals, and the same vision with other nationalisms, including the Arab and Turkish, to which, however, Toynbee was, given his emphatic opposition to all such movements from the 1920s onward, inexplicably tender. The tenderness is manifest in his silence over the treatment by the Turks of the Greeks of Anatolia after they had repelled the Greek invasion in 1922. During the War he had published under his own name, though with official inspiration, a severe denunciation of the Ottoman treatment of the Armenians. He had also, in 1921, as a correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian*, exposed Greek mistreatment of Turkish refugees. But in the case of similar Turkish behavior he judged it politic to keep silent. The calculus which guided him here was most complicated, and sat rather uneasily with the *penchant* to issue draconian and high-minded moral verdicts which, in the case of Zionism and Israel, he felt able to indulge to the full. Toynbee, his biographer explains, looked upon himself as an unofficial mediator between the Turkish Nationalists and the British public and government. Pacific relations between Muslims and Europeans were far more important than the sufferings, however real, of Greeks and other Christians at the hands of the Turks:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Toynbee [we read] was prepared to forget and forgive all the crimes Turkish soldiers had committed—all the more so once he had come to think of such crimes as a function of civilizational break-up, and not, in any simple way, the fault of the perpetrators.

Lucky Turks to benefit from the immense latitude of the historian who, having seen and understood all, is able to forgive all! For their sins, Jews had no such luck.

A Study of History, the product of this complicated and peculiar mind, came out in three batches: Volumes I-III in 1934, IV-VI in 1939, and VII-X in 1954. (A supplemental Volume XI, a historical atlas and gazetteer prepared in collaboration with Edward D. Myres, appeared in 1959.) The first three volumes aroused great interest among historians and were much praised. The next three volumes were more critically received. They also marked a change, which became much more manifest in the last four volumes. The 1930s, during which he was writing these volumes, were a period of great personal and familial strain for Toynbee, while the course of public affairs became steadily more dangerous and alarming. This, his biographer says, explains "the exalted, prophetic tone" of these volumes which dealt with the breakdown and dissolution of civilizations. The volumes contained much exhortation about spiritual and religious reform. Here Toynbee, the "quite satisfactory freethinker" of 1913, spoke of "a Jewish Messiah who was God himself incarnate," and prophesied the advent of a single world state, presumably to be ruled by a second Augustus in whose reign another Incarnation might take place. His father-in-law was seriously troubled by the new religious tone. Signing himself The Old Rationalist, he advised Toynbee to shake himself "and get for a bit into a different and more objective atmosphere."

In the last four volumes the religious tone became decidedly more pronounced. He had a sense of a command laid upon him to spread the revelation he himself had had that secularized Western man was at the end of his tether. There was, he now declared, a meaning behind the facts of history. This meaning is "a revelation of God and a hope of communion with him." The quest is for "a true and better positive centre: Nirvana or God (two names for the same reality, I believe)." This strain of religiosity which now became increasingly manifest seems to have been present in Toynbee for a long time. In the autobiographical section which concludes *A Study of History* he tells of a supernatural experience he had had in 1919 while walking in the Buckingham Palace Road, when he had a feeling that all history, past, present, and future, was flowing through him in a mighty current. He also had a mystical experience following his rebuff at the hands of Eileen Power, and again after his eldest son had killed himself in 1939. In the Thirties again, his marriage with Rosalind was undergoing the strains which led to its breakdown, and she herself was becoming more and more absorbed by Roman Catholicism. These events undoubtedly had their share in setting Toynbee upon his supernatural quest; the second world war which he experienced in his own lifetime no doubt also served powerfully to persuade him that the secularized Western mind was indeed at the end of its tether.

Toynbee's new position was not without its difficulties, as he himself must have realized when, in a letter of 1968, he described the style of his last four volumes as "emotional and contorted." His belief that God and Nirvana are simply two names for the same reality alerts us to the fact, which is confirmed by the evidence of the autobiographical section, that Toynbee's religion, or religiosity, is something eclectic, syncretistic, and diffuse. God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or the God who, according to Christian belief, became man, cannot be the same as Nirvana. The religious issue was decisively joined between Toynbee and Martin Wight. In observations recorded in footnotes and an annex in the section on universal churches in Volume VII, Wight made the point that God as understood in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Christianity (and the same is true of Judaism) is not something; rather, He does something. He is continually active in history. But for Toynbee, religion has to be a religion of the Heart. God is love—that is, an ocean in whose waves men are immersed, finding oblivion and negation of self in this all-enveloping medium. Hence his sympathy for the idea of Nirvana which requires no creed, obligates to no specific duties, and imposes no restrictions or prohibitions. This warm but vague religiosity found great favor with the leader of a Japanese sect said to have eight million adherents, who engaged Toynbee for a large fee to take part in a dialogue in 1972, which was published as a book. This dialogue, Mr. McNeill speculates, might, if the sect were to spread in the West, "like the letters of St. Paul, achieve the status of a sacred scripture," and Toynbee might attain the status of a bodhisattva—i.e., a superhuman being of infinite wisdom and compassion.

In the meantime, one has to consider the effect of this intrusion of a powerful religious preoccupation on the structure of *A Study of History*. As Mr. McNeill rightly points out, the original scheme had seen churches as "chrysalises" from which a new civilization "affiliated" to a previous, disintegrating one would emerge. Churches on this view were simply instrumental, helping to bring about the birth of civilizations which are humanity's supreme achievement, and the only intelligible unit of historical study. But if what Toynbee was now saying was true, then this "would banish most of the matter in his older discourse to the same realm of the irrelevant and meaningless to which he had formerly condemned national history." The later volume, *Reconsiderations*, did nothing to address this crucial difficulty, and Toynbee's grand scheme was left broken in his hands. In Mr. McNeill's judgment—with which the evidence obliges one to concur—*Reconsiderations* showed that little remained of the original vision of *A Study of History*.

By then, however, Toynbee had attained worldwide fame. This, as his biographer explains, was principally the doing of two figures who came quite unexpectedly into Toynbee's life. One was D. C. Somervell, an English schoolmaster who happened to read *A Study of History* and was so greatly taken by it that he set about, in the midst of the war, to make a one-volume abridgment of the six volumes then published. He did his work very skillfully and, with Toynbee's approval, the abridgment was published in 1947. When the abridgment came out, *Time* magazine digested the abridgment and put Toynbee's picture on the cover. Sales of the abridgment immediately shot up, and, in the course of one year, upward of two hundred thousand copies of the hardback edition were sold.

The journalist who wrote the article in *Time* was Whittaker Chambers, an ex-Communist who had repudiated Marxism and was looking for a surrogate. Chambers saw Toynbee as the Sage he had been seeking, supplanting Marx as the best available guide to the meaning of history and of human destiny. Americans by the hundred thousand, perhaps by the million, now tried to find answers to the dilemmas of a new and dangerous postwar world in this book of revelations. Toynbee's new career as a Western Sage peaked in the 1950s, but his increasingly strident anti-Americanism helped to depose him thereafter from this lofty position. As has been seen, he was later to have another such career, this time as an Eastern Sage.

Toynbee's story, then, like the man himself, is complicated and peculiar. It has more than one significance which readers will no doubt ponder. The clue to one possible significance may lie in a distinction which, long ago, I heard Isaiah Berlin attribute to Chaim Weizmann. Weizmann was apparently in the habit of distinguishing between the summer and the winter fool. A summer fool was immediately recognizable. A winter fool, on the other hand, was so wrapped up in layer after layer of flannel that it took much laborious effort to undo these layers and see him for what he was. What is beyond doubt is that Toynbee was not a summer fool.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fictions and fabrications in autobiography today

by James W. Tuttleton

"To Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears." So wrote St. Augustine in his *Confessions* (A.D. 397), a work that brilliantly inaugurated the tradition of autobiography in the West. As the originating model of how the self may be presented in a narrative, it initiated a long tradition of retrospective self-analysis and surprising self-revelation. If Augustine wondered aloud about how he came into "this dying life" and agonized over what his destiny might be, he was disturbingly frank in disclosing his confusions about life's contingencies and accidents. Then the pattern in his lived experience began to be apparent to him, the enormity of his imperfections came over him, he changed his life, and it provoked the writing. Above all, shame at failure is the hallmark of the confessional form he bequeathed to us; but gratitude at God's mercy is its presiding emotion.

There are of course autobiographies without shame, shameless self-revelations of pride and conceit, in which the theme is hagiographical: "my success." But these too owe their origins, indirectly, to the sinful Augustine. Either way—as a revelation of one's folly and vice and of the awful consequences that ensued (presented as a cautionary instance of wasted powers), or as a triumphant account of success in life and how others may attain it (or as both, as in the case of the *Confessions*)—the autobiography, as a form, is nothing if not didactic; and St. Augustine is the originating model.

Far from self-canonization, the *Confessions* dwells at length upon what Augustine calls "my past foulness and the carnal corruptions of my soul." It is the self-revelation of a true voluptuary, sunk in youth in sensual indulgences of every kind. His acts of depravity he enumerates not from a love of them but so that, out of the bitterness of memory, the sweetness of the idea of God may supplant the shameful past and so sustain his inward life. For Augustine, the cause of the evil that afflicted him in his unregenerate life was "the sin and vanity of this life, because I was flesh, and a breath that passeth away and cometh not again." Yet whatever the felt transience of his personal being, there is no doubt that Augustine had an unshakable conviction of the existence of a personal self, an immortal soul that God had created in him, standing in opposition to the temptations of the flesh and the perversions of the will.

But it should also be remarked that the *Confessions* is the work of a man of the world, a professor giving instruction to students in the methods of classical rhetoric and oratory. Augustine was a man accustomed to debate with the "Academics" (the Greek philosophical school which questioned the validity of all belief), and his eloquent panegyrics were sought out by the Emperor Valentinian in Rome. Above all, the *Confessions* is a search for his origin and destiny and a revelation of the hidden secrets of his life. It is an account

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of how an inquiring mind—caught up in the debates over paganism, astrology, Manichaeanism, and other heresies—abandoned his "lip service" to rhetoric, a profession valuing words above truth. He resigned his appointment, submitted himself to the discipline of the learned Ambrose, and, through the mysterious workings of God's grace, attained what he called the salvation of true belief in Catholic Christianity.

As a work of rhetorical sophistication and psychological insight into the appetites of the flesh and the self's cagey internal maneuvers, the work of St. Augustine is perhaps equalled only by *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1781-1788). For Rousseau, as Northrop Frye observes in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), extended the methods of Augustine and established the very modern type of autobiography.

Rousseau begins his narrative by remarking: "I am commencing an undertaking hitherto without precedent, and which will never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself." (There have of course been imitators aplenty.) If Rousseau, like Augustine, gives us the good, the bad, and the ugly, there is an immediate difference between these men in the monstrous size of Rousseau's Ego. For two centuries Rousseau has been praised or blamed for his blithe readiness to celebrate himself as the product of his own sensual and emotional experience. His search for salvation in his own subjectivity, and the distorted impressionism of his belief in the vanity of his earthly existence are hallmarks of his work. Above all, with Rousseau, feeling is first. (How different is the autobiography of his contemporary, that true child of the Enlightenment, Benjamin Franklin.) Rousseau remarks that the "confused emotions which I felt one after the other, certainly did not warp the reasoning powers . . . ; but they shaped them in me of a peculiar stamp, and gave me odd and romantic notions of human life, of which experience and reflection have never been able wholly to cure me."

Worshipping freedom, abhorring restraint, soliciting ecstatic transport, "burning with love, without an object," Rousseau created the literary form of the Romantic self in all its shameless narcissism. His aim is not less didactic than that of Augustine, but his account of surrendering himself to "the promptings of my taste or to the most luxurious indolence" necessarily accounts for the treacly *Weltschmerz* of the *Confessions* and *Musings of a Solitary Stroller* (1782), where he laments that

> all is a continual flux upon the earth. Nothing in it keeps a form constant and determinate; our affections—fastening on external things—necessarily change and pass just as they do. Even in front of us or behind us, they recall the past that is gone, or anticipate a future that in many a case is destined never to be. There is nothing solid to which the heart can fix itself. Here we have little more than a pleasure that comes and passes away; as for the happiness that endures, I cannot tell if it be so much as known among men.

Rousseau, as they say in France, "privileges" sincerity, but we may very well ask whether his "sincerity" isn't a more complicated linguistic gambit than anything to be found in Augustine, the master of rhetoric. Augustine, it must be remembered, decried the idea of the self as the product of one's own literary mythmaking, and so renounced the emptiness of mere eloquence. Certainly Rousseau's sincerity lacks Augustine's convincing humility, and the narrative of Rousseau's several contemptible acts of meanness seems calculated rather to titillate than to warn. Rousseau intuitively knew that readers savor confessions of iniquity because they are able vicariously to participate in the seductions of evil without incurring the blame for it, and because, simultaneously with the narrator, they can condemn his misdeeds, thus at last defending the right and so justifying their own virtue.

In his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918), Adams was later to say that most educators after Rousseau

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> have declined to show themselves before their scholars as objects more vile or contemptible than necessary, and even the humblest teacher hides, if possible, the faults with which nature has generously embellished us all, as it did Jean-Jacques, thinking, as most religious minds are apt to do, that the Eternal Father himself may not feel unmixed pleasure at our thrusting under his eyes chiefly the least agreeable details of his creation.

But there may be other, more hidden, less "virtuous" reasons for dwelling on the disagreeable details of one's shameful life. As the French theorist Philippe Lejeune has remarked in *On Autobiography* (1989),[1] there is a real sense in which the autobiographical account gratifies the writer's hidden desire to re-enact his own crimes through language. Writing may thus be a pleasurable repetition of the forbidden. Rousseau is not always consciously aware of this latent motive for writing, but the *jouissance* evident in some of his confessions suggests at times more pleasure than sorrow. (As T. S. Eliot observed in "Baudelaire," "So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist.") Rousseau's pleasure in his existence, even if it is disfigured by the transience of pleasure and a history of vice, leads him to prevent the reader from feeling any sense of superiority. In the prayer to which Henry Adams alluded, ostensibly to the Deity, Rousseau adjured the Eternal Father to let readers

> groan at my unworthiness; let them blush at my meannesses! Let each of them discover his heart in his turn at the foot of Thy throne with the same sincerity; and then let any one of them tell Thee if he dares: "I was a better man!"

Ostensibly the didactic motive here is to compel the reader to face his own iniquities, to compare them with Rousseau's, and in the act of degrading himself, to effect the elevation of Rousseau in his esteem. Rousseau could afford a degree of complacency because he knew that *the reader has already been corrupted*, if not by his own misdeeds, then certainly by the experience of vicariously committing the sins of the author: the act of reading thus produces and reproduces the fall from innocence into a knowledge of good and evil. We feel this taint, this contamination, most evidently when we are exposed to pornography, but it is theoretically an affect of all confessional writing, especially where the author is felt to have committed misdeeds worse than our own.

The confession, it should be said, is not strictly identical with autobiography. In fact, the term autobiography is of relatively recent coinage: it was used first by Robert Southey, according to the OED, in 1809. As James M. Cox remarks in *Recovering Literature's Lost Ground: Essays in American Autobiography* (1989):[2]

> Before the emergence of the term, there were two categories of people's lives written by themselves: the confession and the memoir. The confession was an account of a man's private life, centering on his emotions, feelings, secrets, frustrations—essentially his private world. The memoir was more on the order of chronicle, relating to the individual's role upon the stage of history. The confession bared the inner thoughts; the memoir recounted the career.

But if "autobiography" is the umbrella term for both of these forms, it has come to mean much more, as well as much less. It is therefore worth asking what "autobiography" does mean and whether it is a genre. If so,

1 *On Autobiography*, by Philippe Lejeune, edited and with a foreword by Paul John Eakin; translated from the French by Katherine Leary; University of Minnesota Press, 289 pages, $45; $16.95 paper.

2 *Recovering Literature's Lost Ground: Essays in American Autobiography*, by James M. Cox; Louisiana State University Press, 221 pages, $27.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is it "literature"? And what is its status nowadays in the field of contemporary criticism?

At the December 1989 convention of the Modern Language Association, a call went out for papers next winter on the theme of "Autobiographical Writing: The Question of the Canon." Suggested topics included "the existence of an autobiographical canon, its composition, characteristic features, range; the construction of the canon—how works have been or are included or excluded from the canon; excluded works that should be included; included works that should be excluded; and the uses and benefits (or lack thereof) of the autobiographical canon."

That such a program has been planned might seem to assume the existence of the genre and of a canon of distinguished autobiographies. But, since Derridadaist thinking now authorizes us to subvert common sense by reversing the priorities of judgment and taste, I can already foresee the tenor of the discussions at the convention next year. The "Academics" will simultaneously (1) deny that such a thing as the "self" can exist; (2) thus ridicule the idea of the existence of autobiography as a genre; (3) yet unwittingly concede that the genre exists by demanding that its masterworks (Augustine, Rousseau) be relegated to the margin; hence (4) call for the "centering" of marginal autobiographies by slaves, women, or other neglected writers needing "empowerment"; and (5) condemn the "privileged hegemony" of the canon of received autobiographies by "dead, white, European males." This much seems fairly certain: autobiography is currently riding the groundswell of literary criticism in the academy and the number of books devoted to the genre is proliferating.

As to whether it is a genre, Linda H. Peterson remarks in *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self-Interpretation* (1986), that most autobiographers from the eighteenth-century onward believed themselves to be writing in a distinctive form established by Augustine, Rousseau, Cellini, Casanova, and others. Autobiographies have always been popular with what used to be called the "common reader" because we have a natural human curiosity about what public and private men and women, with some claim to our attention, think and feel about their experience. And writers in the form have understood that.

But the assumptions of deconstructionism in the academy have called into question the very existence of genres and dissolved all writing into mere "discourse." Thus the very idea of a literary canon, a repertoire of select instances of autobiography, is under attack. Michel Butor may have begun the assault in 1969 by telling an MLA audience in Denver that "there is no real difference between fiction and nonfiction, between a novel and an autobiography." And indeed I have seen course syllabuses devoted to the novel that have included conventional autobiographies. By 1979, Paul de Man announced in "Autobiography as De-facement" that "empirically as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition." And a few years later Avrom Fleishman, in *Figures of Autobiography* (1983), delivered himself of the opinion that since "autobiography is not generically distinguished by formal constituents, linguistic register, or audience effects," it "therefore has no history as a genre." Despite these *énonciations*, this non-genre without a history is just coming into its own as a field of study. Some of the best recent work has been done by Paul John Eakin, in *Fictions in Autobiography* (1985), and James Olney, who has written *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (1972) and edited two collections by divers hands, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980) and *Studies in Autobiography* (1989).

Aside from Olney's contributions, some of the most interesting work has been done in France by Claude Roy in *Nous, essai d'autobiographie* (1972) and *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1977). But of the various French students of the genre the most comprehensive and absorbing is Philippe Lejeune, author of *L'Autobiographie en France* (1971), *Lire Leiris, autobiographie et langage* (1975), *Le Pacte autobiographique* (1975), *Je est un autre, l'autobiographie de la*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

litterature aux medias (1980), and *Mois aussi* (1986). And now, with the translated collection of his essays, *On Autobiography*, splendidly introduced by Paul John Eakin, we are in a position to grasp much more clearly the theoretical foundations of Lejeune's lifelong criticism of the autobiographical form.

For Lejeune, there can be no essentialist definition of the form of autobiography. Any attempt to formulate a conception of the ideal autobiography, the Form from which each instance is a defection into actuality, must end in failure, such is the extraordinary range of formal qualities, as well as content, to be encountered in actual self-lives. Critics of an Idealist tendency will surely disagree. But if we grant Lejeune his historicist emphasis, his tentative definition of autobiography follows: "the retrospective prose narrative that someone writes concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality." (Lejeune gives due attention to the memoir as well as to ghost-written or translated autobiographies.) But how, on the formal level, can we distinguish such a narrative from a novel's first-person retrospective personal narration? The question of intention is critical here. And Michel Butor was quite right to insist that the internal elements of a first-person narration give us no clue as to whether a life-story is that of an actual person or a fictively invented persona. But Lejeune has proposed a way of distinguishing between such narrations. He calls it the "autobiographical pact."

According to Lejeune, "the proper name" to be found on the title page is the "deep subject" of autobiography. The title page, with the author's name, must be seen as part of the text; it establishes the identity, the proper name, that may be attached to the author, the narrator, and the protagonist. In the autobiographical narrative, the "I" has explicit reference to the name on the title page, and that denomination escapes mere textuality by its ineluctable reference to a person existing in the real world, whose existence is verifiable by legal or other records. The "I" who puts his name on the title page has made a contract or pact with the reader that the testimony he is about to give refers to a true person; and the reader simultaneously commits himself to a belief in the real existence of the "I" of the narrative.

Lejeune's ruminations on autobiography are much more complex and extensive than can be conveniently summarized here. *On Autobiography* contains illuminating chapters on autobiography in the third person, the ironic narrative of childhood, the order of autobiographical narrative (in Sartre's *Le Mots* [1963]), the autobiographies of those who do not write, and autobiography in relation to literary and social history. Much of his own writing about the form is highly personal. And it is engaging to observe him trying to be "in the intellectual swim," yet holding his own among the Parisian Marxists, semioticians, and deconstructionists who have attacked him as a formalist, a believer in the bourgeois fiction of the self, and a naïf who trusts in the adequacy of language truthfully to represent an "I," which to them is fictitious in any case. The following waffling passage, from *Moi aussi*, gives us a sense of his plight, as well as an indication of his saving sanity.

> It's better to get on with the confessions: yes, I have been fooled. I believe that we can promise to tell the truth; I believe in the transparency of language, and in the existence of a complete subject who expresses himself through it; . . . I believe in the Holy Ghost of the first person. And who doesn't believe in it? But of course it also happens that I believe the contrary, or at least claim to believe it. Whence the fascination that *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* . . . has held for me; it seems to be the anti-*Pact* par excellence. . . . "In the field of the subject, there is no referent." We *indeed know* all this; we are not so dumb, but, once this precaution has been taken, we go on as if we did not know it. Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as complete subject—it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Not all the attention to autobiography is as academic and theoretical as that provided by Lejeune. In fact, a flood of "how-to" books have recently appeared, each with a title like *Your Life Story: How To Write, Print, Publish and Sell It Yourself.* I am particularly taken by the list of dos and don'ts abstracted by Lejeune from Richard G. Lillard's *American Life in Autobiography* (1956). Although the formulaic writing of autobiography is bound to fail, one wishes that Rousseau, Richard Wright, Emma Goldman, William Carlos Williams, and some of our other autobiographers had taken this advice:

> For the author, the ten capital sins of autobiography would be: stereotyped writing, abuse of anecdotes, detailed (and improbable) reconstruction of scenes and dialogues, insertion of undigested diary entries, ancestral and family catalogs at the beginning of the book, overly detailed travel narratives, memories of youth that have no relevance, name dropping, too hasty narratives, camouflage of the truth. And the six cardinal virtues would be: sadness, recognition of one's errors and failures; affective communication with the reader from the beginning; original details and characteristics of the era or the personality; coherent point of view, exploited for a new insight; personal frame of reference in the story; sense of progression or change.

In accounting for this flooding new interest in the genre, James M. Cox, in *Recovering Literature's Lost Ground,* argues that the traditional modes of aesthetic criticism, with their emphasis on lyric poetry and drama, had little use for autobiography, with the effect that this important *literary* genre was substantially lost to criticism. His point is not that autobiographies have not received serious critical attention. Indeed, Edmund Wilson, F.W. Dupee, and F.O. Matthiessen, among others, were deeply interested in the form as reflected in the self-lives of writers like Henry Adams and Henry James. But especially among the New Critics autobiography seemed less accessible to intrinsic analysis than lyric verse. Cox sees several causes for the new explosion of critical interest in the genre:

> the relative "exhaustion" or critical exploitation of the traditional generic fields of drama, poetry, and fiction; the "political" possibility of escaping from the seemingly aesthetic or closed dimension of imaginative literature into the historical and referential possibilities of autobiography; the theoretical potentialities afforded by the problematic reference that autobiography inevitably evokes; and, I think, the growing sense or fear that the "self" upon which the imperial extension of the term *autobiography* was predicated may in fact be nothing more than a fiction that contemporary critical theory will at last expose.

I cannot believe that drama, poetry, and fiction have been exhausted by criticism, although I will concede that some of the professoriate are apparently suffering "burn-out" and would rather talk about Foucault than Faulkner one more time. But Cox has identified at least some of the motives stimulating the study of autobiography.

In attempting to recover "literature's lost ground," Professor Cox himself offers a collection of essays, composed over the past twenty years, on various American autobiographies. As far as I can tell, he is completely innocent of any theory of autobiography, or at least of one worthy of Paris or the MLA establishment. In fact, Cox frankly confesses that "I am no closer to a theory of the subject than I was when I began writing about it a quarter century ago." This theoretical innocence may lead readers to wonder about his selections. Some of them are quite unexpected, and only two of them seem properly literary: *The Education of Henry Adams* and Henry James's *Autobiography.*

Cox is of the opinion that "the very idea of autobiography has grown out of the political necessities and discoveries of the American and French revolutions." And it is true that de Tocqueville said that "democracy turns man's imagination away from externals to concentrate it on himself alone." But the Ego is of older origin than the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Declaration of Independence, and in any case no adequate evidence is adduced by Cox for his political reading of autobiography's origin. Cox's "recovery" of the lost literature of autobiography comes down to original readings of Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), U. S. Grant's *Memoirs* (1885-86), and Booker T. Washington's *The Story of My Life and Work* (1900), as well as *Up From Slavery* (1901). Interspersed throughout Cox's book are ruminations on Franklin's *Autobiography* (1771-88), Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), and Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). But the puzzling final chapter, on Shelby Foote's three-volume military history, *The Civil War* (1958-73), has nothing to do with autobiography. In justifying his attention to this book, Cox remarks that "Foote's narrative, if not a work about his life, is a great life work." But is this a criterion for including it in a book on autobiography? If so, any writer's major project (say, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*) can be called autobiography. But then, these days, anything goes—except the logic of definitions or the classification of the literary genus and its differentiae.

Each of Cox's essays will repay attention, but inattention to the logic of his position produces anomalies. Defining autobiography as "a narrative of a person's life written by himself," Cox nevertheless includes a long chapter on Emerson's essays. Since they do not constitute a *narrative* of his life, how can they qualify as autobiographical? And of course anyone who wants to read the autobiography of Alice B. Toklas had better turn to her *What Is Remembered* (1963) and not to Stein's fictional work, which imagines how her lesbian companion might have told Stein's story. As Lejeune remarks in *On Autobiography*, this kind of gamesmanship "is finally only the alibi for a presentation of the self"; it is Stein's "astute way to achieve a form of self-hagiography that neutralizes or paralyzes criticism. The reader must be captivated by the double reading proposed to him by the enunciation of the 'witness' as fictitious authority and as autobiographical relay." (For an insight into how Stein writes *her own* autobiography, readers may want to consult Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography* [1938], but not many do.)

Cox's work ought to be read alongside Herbert Leibowitz's *Fabricating Lives: Explorations in American Autobiography*, a series of chapters on the autobiographies of Benjamin Franklin, Louis Sullivan, Jane Addams, Emma Goldman, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, Richard Wright, and Edward Dahlberg.[3] Leibowitz, the editor of *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* and a professor at the City University of New York, is, like Cox, innocent of theory—or at least of explicit attention to theory. But the term "fabricating lives," like the language of some of the other titles I have mentioned ("altered egos," "fictions in autobiography"), suggests not merely something constructed or made but something concocted with an intent to deceive.

Doubtless the autobiographer may lie or be self-deceived. And no doubt the process of selection makes the printed life a reduction; it may even produce a distortion. But does every autobiography present a fiction, a fabrication in this negative sense? One wishes that Leibowitz had ruminated more extensively on this point.

He asserts that he has made style a criterion of inclusion in this collection (which suggests an aesthetic slant) and that his authors "represent a cross-section of American experience, a self-portrait gallery spanning almost two centuries" (which suggests a wish somehow to be representative of the range of American life possibilities). I am not convinced. The rationale of inclusion is never neutral; such choices are never innocent. The chosen authors in this case represent, on the whole, a cross-section of American radicals, or at least a group of romantics reflecting an aversion from normative American expe-

3 *Fabricating Lives: Explorations in American Autobiography*, by Herbert Leibowitz; Knopf, 386 pages, $24.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rience and a wish somehow to change the world.

Setting aside for the moment Franklin (who was more revolutionary than he?—although the romantics won't claim him), each of these authors was an incorrigible romanticist who, in one way or another, set himself against the social and moral values of mainstream America. Although it is true that for some of them the principal form of revolutionary activity occurred on the level of style, most of them had utopian hankerings of one kind or another that made them enemies of the felt oppressive status quo. Addams, in founding Hull House, pursued an activist political agenda that included then-radical social welfare programs in Chicago. Stein, who could find no place for herself in America, became an expatriate in Paris, where she sought a more congenial environment for radical aesthetic modernism and for her unconventional sexual arrangements. Richard Wright wanted nothing less than the spiritual and material emancipation of blacks and thought it could be achieved through the Communist Party, from which he was eventually ejected as too much the artistic individualist. Dahlberg abandoned fiction for political harangues in Union Square when he joined the Communist Party in the Thirties, but he was so cantankerous and vituperative with fellow party members that he could not last and his politics later veered wildly to the right. And Emma Goldman, a political anarchist who wanted the total overthrow of the United States government, was mixed up with terrorists, and was deported to Russia.

Leibowitz is a lively writer full of shrewd insights and persuasive judgments. If he paraphrases perfectly understandable quotations at too great a length, the style is still lively and readable. But if he is innocent of theory, he must be judged guilty of gaudy figurative language. Metaphors and similes are out of control in this book. A couple of instances, taken at random: of Conrad Aiken's style in *Ushant* (1952), Leibowitz remarks, "We succumb at moments to the tintinnabulation of Aiken's words, or steer through the ambiguous prose aided by the buoys chiming their warnings, yet the sense of watching a performance by arcane abstractions never leaves the reader"; or this, a Melvillean remark about Emma Goldman's *Living My Life*: "Goldman could not let go of a single experience, and therefore could not boil down the blubber in a stylistic tryworks in order to extract cruets of pure oil."

But these defects are less significant than the justification of his choices. If we test Leibowitz's authors against the standard posed by V. S. Pritchett—"Nothing in this genre lasts unless it is done with art . . . . There is no credit in living; the credit is in being able to specify experience"—then many of Leibowitz's authors will have to be dismissed immediately. Whatever one may think of Williams's poetry, his autobiography is frankly a mess. Goldman's is chaos. The work of Sullivan and Addams has only a distant historical interest. Experience in Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is so unspecified, vague, and indeterminate that even it hangs on by a thread. Only Franklin and Edward Dahlberg created a memorable style, produced a genuine authentic signature. Franklin is supremely sane, though mistrusted by incorrigible romanticists from D. H. Lawrence on down. But the priapic Dahlberg, author of *Bottom Dogs* (1929), *Do These Bones Live?* (1941), and *The Flea of Sodom* (1950), is such a paranoid misanthropist (and misogynist: married seven times) that his brilliant flights of baroque and euphuistic rhetoric suggest at times the truly psychotic.

Dahlberg took the title *Because I Was Flesh* from Augustine's phrase, of course, and even followed it up with *The Confessions of Edward Dahlberg* (1971). But—to enlarge on an observation of Charles DeFanti in *The Wages of Expectation* (1978), his splendid life of Dahlberg—both books are less "Augustinian self-revelation than a series of farces and character assassinations." Bastard son of the seductive hairdresser Lizzie and the philandering barber Saul Gottdank (who abandoned them), Dahlberg (1900-1977)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grew up in a Jewish Orphan Asylum in Cleveland raging against his parents and, by an easy extension, everyone else. Dahlberg never forgave his father for abandoning him, but something of his wild baroque comedy is evident in this passage, quoted by Leibowitz, about his father's priapic iniquity:

> Whatever Saul was not even Saul knew; he was born corrupt, and what he did was natural to him. What was bad for others was good for him. A kind or charitable act on his part would have been gross deceit. He fobbed *women when he desired to lie with them*—which is nature. This is not hypocrisy because it is the way the world is made. Saul was some baleful seminal drop of a depraved rotting forefather; he lived solely to discharge his sperm.

Some of Dahlberg's ex-friends have read this passage as a self-portrait, but Leibowitz is right to see *Because I Was Flesh* as an act of Oedipal expiation culminating in the bestowed blessing on the hapless mother Lizzie:

> When the image of her comes up on a sudden—just as my bad demons do—and I see again her dyed henna hair, the eyes dwarfed by the electric lights in the Star Lady's Barbershop, and the dear, broken wing of her mouth, and when I regard her wild tatters, I know that not even Solomon in his lilied raiment was so glorious as my mother in her rags. *Selah.*

Dahlberg isn't Augustine, but no one can ever be bored reading him.

If, in *Fabricating Lives*, Leibowitz is a much more severe critic of the stylistic failings of his authors than I have been (though not of his own), he is also a much more generous expositor of their aims and intentions—possibly because of his sympathy with their incorrigible romanticism. It is doubtless the case that modern autobiography since Rousseau has been a "romantic" mode because it rests its claim on the absorbing interest of a single self, the private drama interwoven of the past and the present. The genre is, after all, as unstable as the novel because it is as elastic as human experience itself. Finally, autobiography attains a supremely romantic effect because, after the book has been written and read, there remains a residue of inexplicable mystery attaching to the personality and experience of the author.

Montaigne caught this essential paradox in his essay "On Experience," where he remarks that Perseus, the King of Macedonia, was "of such a flighty and erratic character that neither he nor anyone else knew what kind of man he was." Montaigne extended this meditation by observing that

> above all men, I have known another of his stature to whom this conclusion would apply still more properly, I think: no middle position, always being carried away from one extreme to the other by causes impossible to guess; no kind of course without tacking and changing direction amazingly; no quality unmixed, so that the most likely portrait of him that men will be able to make some day, will be that he affected and studied to make himself known by being unknowable.

As James M. Cox has suggested, he probably had in mind Henry IV of France. But for the great skeptic Montaigne, variousness was not a matter of kingship alone: the essential unknowability of the self, no matter how fully expressed, is the great human attribute. We find this essential unknowability in all who have written their own lives. However faithfully they try to tell us about the outer and inner condition of their experience, something of what Augustine called the soul shines forth yet eludes exact transcription. By trying on other lives, through the reading of autobiography, we keep encountering the mystery we are trying to fathom—the something about ourselves we wish to know.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The song of Thomas Kinsella

by Floyd Skloot

Nothing intervened between the song and its expression. The singer managed many difficult things, but the result was to focus attention on the song, not on the performance or on the quality of the voice.

—Thomas Kinsella, on hearing the old-style Irish singer Jerry Flaherty in 1959

The first day I met Thomas Kinsella, in the fall of 1969, he was questioning what a poem was. The focus was D. H. Lawrence's "Autumn at Taos" and I remember a tremendous sense of confusion about the situation.

On the one hand, here was the forty-one-year-old Irish poet I'd come from New York to southern Illinois to study with. In his dressy clothes and trimmed beard, he was as neat and formal as I imagined him to be from his poems. He marched in on time and announced *I'm Kinsella*, with the accent on Kin. I was glad he looked like a sonnet, though surprised he didn't pronounce his name right. It seemed likely that working with him would proceed in an orderly enough manner—an Irish Catholic and a New York Jew deep in the part of Illinois they call "Little Egypt."

On the other hand, here was this rollicking chant of a poem by Lawrence, this teeming, excessive paean to a state of mind, and Kinsella seemed to love it. He'd entered it fully, reading aloud in his clipped voice, highlighting the repetitions and echoes, sounding oddly urgent as he passed through the poem. Clearly, this was the active involvement of a reader who believed in the poem, almost despite himself. I sat there wanting Lawrence to tighten the thing up, exercise some control, while Kinsella kept saying that what made "Autumn at Taos" a good poem was how closely it came to the thing it was perceiving. He acknowledged its flaws and mannerisms, but the poem was onto something he valued and wanted to do himself. He talked about stripping away everything that stood between the song and its expression—predetermined forms and logic, imposed shapes, literary reference, anything that suggested the presence of a writer behind the poem. My head was spinning.

The Kinsella I came to study with wrote elegantly structured, lyrical poems in a harshly clear tone of voice ("I fold my towel with what grace I can,/Not young and not renewable, but man"). The Kinsella I found was saying that "the relationship between the thing perceived and the perceiving self must be personal, otherwise it would be sentimentalized and exaggerated." Later, he spoke about "an articulated descent into the psyche," saying, "I think this is what poetry is now all about—the growth point." He said he was toying with automatic writing, exploring the subterranean territory of the psyche. He wanted to achieve a kind of poem that dictated its own form in order to leap from "Phoenix Park," with its rigidly controlled eleven-syllable lines and narrative

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

framework, which he felt was the best he could do in the traditional way. Talk of technique seemed beside the point.

Even after I learned to separate the man from his poems, an important lesson for any twenty-two-year-old, Kinsella kept surprising me. Challenge was always in the air. He came across as stable and what you might call tidy if it didn't sound so peculiar. He'd been an administrator in his country's finance department for many years before coming to southern Illinois and seemed eminently capable of *management*. But there was also this sense of artistic upheaval around him, an air of quest. We would meet in a small group, just Kinsella and three young writers. He was willing to discuss our work from time to time, but there was much greater emphasis placed on studying poems he would assign. He seemed to be heading somewhere, exploring new territory for himself as well as for us, and was uneasy with formal analysis or exegesis. As we examined in depth the poems he was interested in at the time (Eliot's "Marina," Creeley's "The Finger," Thomas's "Fern Hill"), the questions that kept emerging were how the poems communicated, how they removed artificial barriers and achieved meaning, how they approximated the flow of thought.

From the vantage point of 1990, the essence of my bewilderment seems obvious. I'd caught Kinsella at the very moment he was transforming himself into a poet entirely unlike the one I had come to study with.

With the publication of *Blood and Family*,[1] Thomas Kinsella's work is now appearing in America for the first time in ten years. The volume, consisting of one long poem and four extended sequences, is typically formidable. Little that could be imported from outside the world of these poems will help one penetrate their layered surfaces; one enters and attempts to follow where the twists of association lead. This is the first page of the book, introducing "The Messenger," a poem in memory of the poet's father, who had recently died:

> For days I have wakened and felt immediately
> half sick at something. Hour follows hour
> but my shoulders are chilled with expectation.
>
> It is more than mere Loss
> (your tomb-image
> drips and blackens, my leaden root
> curled on your lap)
> or "what you missed."
> (The hand conceives an impossible Possible
> and exhausts in mid-reach.
> *What could be more natural?*)
>
> Deeper. A suspicion in the bones
> as though they too could melt in filth.
>
> Something to discourage goodness.
>
> *A moist movement within.*
> *A worm winds on its hoard.*
> *A rim of hide lifts like a lip.*
>
> *A dead egg glimmers—a pearl in muck*
> *glimpsed only as the muck settles.*
> *The belly settles and crawls tighter.*

Vintage Kinsella. There is the crisp voice laying out a scene and beginning to analyze it, another voice from deeper inside the speaker's head commenting until a dialogue between components of the psyche is engaged, the call from still another voice—the counselor—for continued penetration ("Deeper"), and then the emergence of familiar symbols from the psyche's depths.

Indeed, despite the decade's interruption, a reader of *Blood and Family* feels immediately in familiar Kinsella territory. That feeling is enhanced by the fact that the volume begins with "The Messenger," which is the poem that concluded his previous volume. This is one of many deliberate gestures back to earlier work. The imagery of muck and mire, of ooze and egginess and animal matter, is here again. One sequence, "Her Vertical Smile," refers to several other sequences Kinsella wrote

1 *Blood and Family*, by Thomas Kinsella; Oxford University Press, 89 pages, $9.95 paper.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about his friend, the late Irish composer John Reidy (Seán O Riada). Another ("Out of Ireland") revisits Reidy's burial place, where earlier long poems were set, and is a sequence of seven love poems incorporating details out of Kinsella's love poems from as far back as the early Sixties. A full understanding of the volume's longest sequence, "Songs of the Psyche," also requires recognition of scenes and language from previous poems. A central section of this sequence is, in fact, a return to the "tree with a twisted trunk" from the 1966 sequence "Wormwood." It incorporates and comments on both the tree and the married couple from that earlier work. Familiar lines, which operate like stage directions, occur throughout ("I settled back and/turned inward").

All of this shouldn't imply that the poet has run out of inspiration and is repeating himself. Rather, these connections are meant to show that he is engaged in an ongoing project, with each installment offered to the public as a work-in-progress. Kinsella's project is a quest, in the form of one extended work spanning the years of his maturity, to re-define for himself what poetry is and what the proper relationship might be between singer and song. Is it possible for nothing to intervene between the song and its expression in poetry? This is the quest he began in the mid-1960s.

First and foremost, *Blood and Family* reconfirms that the project is continuing. This is not simply another discrete book to add to the shelf.

In 1979, when Wake Forest University Press issued Kinsella's poetry in two volumes, his career seemed to have reached a point of culmination. One Wake Forest volume contained selected early poems, those on which his substantial reputation had been built. They culled the exquisitely accomplished formal verse he wrote through his early forties, which had prompted critics to include Kinsella among the few poets of the first order writing in English. In addition, the volume ended with a transitional group of poems written in a new manner that was to become characteristic, as in these lines from "Notes from the Land of the Dead" (1973):

> Falling. Mind darkening.
> Toward a ring of mouths.
> Flushed.
> Time, distance,
> meaning nothing.
> No matter.

When critic Calvin Bedient got a look at these newer poems, he lamented Kinsella's "death of the will to order," feeling that the poet had brooded himself to pieces. Like many other critics, he wanted the old grace and poise of Kinsella's art. It is worth noting, however, that this new poetry was written during a period widely characterized by protest and rebellion. The university where Kinsella was teaching, like many during the spring of 1970, was shut down by rioting in the wake of the Kent State killings. Poise and grace seemed irrelevant to many poets then, and Kinsella, as the harsh cultural and political observations of his poems always demonstrated, was not immune to such forces.

Even so, the issue in his new poetry *was* the will to order; it had not died in Kinsella, it had just begun to transform. There was to be another kind of order from now on. That was the logic behind breaking his oeuvre where the Wake Forest collection did, underscoring the idea that post-1968 Kinsella was another writer altogether.

The second volume contained all the poems of this other Kinsella. These were poems he originally published himself, in pamphlets issued by his own Peppercanister Press, founded in Dublin in 1972. They were all extended sequences or long poems in his new manner, feeding off each other, picking up symbols and references as they moved along. Each new piece was an addition to "The Entire Fabric," as Kinsella entitled one poem. He was being quite clear about the nature of his ongoing project, even providing (in "Vertical Man") a plot

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

summary of its system and a portrayal of his working methods amid the project's elaborate blueprints: "remove and put down the spectacles and bury/my face in my hands, in self-devouring prayer,/till the charts and notes come crawling to life again/under a Night seething with/soft incandescent bombardment!"

At that point—in the 1979 Wake Forest volume—there were eight of these Peppercanister pamphlets, whose range of reference included natural history, politics, love, music, aesthetics, philosophy, and psychology. One finished the Wake Forest books wondering what Kinsella might do next, since he'd written that "The Messenger" concluded the series. It seemed possible that the shaping impulse might reassert itself now that literal and figurative fathers had been buried.

Most of what he did next was to translate from the Irish and edit *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1986). Those two efforts overlapped and took a long time because, in preparing the anthology, he rejected all but a few existing translations from the Irish and instead translated roughly fourteen centuries' worth of verse himself. So there has been ten years' worth of suspense about his work, especially for those who did not have access to the new series of Peppercanisters. Beginning *Blood and Family* with "The Messenger" lets the reader know at once that Kinsella means us to read his new work as another wing of the project, one which wraps around all that came before.

The point is, this is shaping up to be Kinsella's *Cantos*.

Born in 1928, Thomas Kinsella belongs to a generation of writers who abandoned formal poetry in mid-career, rejecting its metrics and rhymes, its logic and traditional order, its subjects and stances, in search of freedoms more suitable to the world as they found it. All came to artistic maturity during a time of cultural upheaval, when refashioning one's style and life was part of the *Zeitgeist*. His cohorts include Galway Kinnell, W. S. Merwin, James Wright, Donald Hall, Adrienne Rich, John Montague, Thom Gunn—poets noted both for their early mastery of the inherited tradition and for their later movement into freer, more flexible verse and open forms.

Kinsella changed in mid-career, but he evolved like none of his contemporaries: he did not become a fantasist, he did not dedicate himself to the stripped-down image and "pure clear word," he did not become a mystic or withdraw from the self, he was not distrustful of language. Instead, he held onto the notion of form, although rejecting the ordering principles of rhyme, metrics, and those imposed patterns at which he was so adept. Fascinated by the relationship between the thing perceived and the perceiving self, he turned inward to investigate imagination and its muse, seeking an alternative form within the material itself. Since that material was his own psyche, Kinsella's formal precepts quickly came to resemble those of his countryman James Joyce rather than W. B. Yeats, to whom he was so often compared.

To mid-career, Kinsella had certainly been regarded as a distinguished poet, the dominant presence among his generation in Ireland. There was an image of authority connected with his endeavors, perhaps because of his seriousness, staying power, and the commanding voice that characterizes his poetry. If anyone was going to continue the Yeatsian tradition, some critics thought it was Kinsella. But they overlooked the ominous strain of dislocation in his poems, their obsession with departure and erosion, their growing sense of the gap between imagination and life. The poems are filled with restlessness: "life is hunger, hunger is for order,/And hunger satisfied brings on new hunger/Till there's nothing to come."

Then—in the late 1960s—the elegant poet of anthology pieces such as the intricately rhymed meditation "Mirror in February," or the lyrical terza rima quest "Downstream," went silent. After the massive "Phoenix Park," which, along with the title poem, concluded his 1968

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

collection, *Nightwalker and Other Poems*, the shaping impulse, so central to his work until then, seemed to have exhausted itself. He could no longer be the poet of the "will that gropes for/structure." I've always taken the little poem "Leaf-Eater" from that collection as the model of Kinsella's position at this point in time:

> On a shrub in the heart of the garden,
> On an outer leaf, a grub twists
> Half its body, a tendril,
> This way and that in blind
> Space: no leaf or twig
> Anywhere in reach; then gropes
> Back on itself and begins
> To eat its own leaf.

Never one to do things moderately, Kinsella gave up his career in Ireland's finance department and moved from Dublin to Carterville, Illinois (what you might call suburban Carbondale), in order to teach at Southern Illinois University and devote more time to his writing. The poem "Phoenix Park" confronts the agony this relocation involved: "One stays or leaves. The one who returns is not/The one, etcetera. And we are leaving." The stakes were very high for Kinsella at this moment—giving up a career and homeland for the sake of his art, uprooting his family—and there can be no doubt that he was responding to great internal pressure for change.

He began reconfiguring his poetry as well. What emerged were poems exploring the workings of human consciousness. As he said in "Worker in Mirror, at His Bench," a major poem from this period: "I tinker with the things that dominate me/as they describe their random/persistent coherences . . . /clean surfaces shift/and glitter among themselves." Apparently formless, deeply interiorized and associative, his new poems were presented as they emerged from some plane of the poet's psyche. Their only structural logic was the utterly private connections of one man's mind. Often, they would begin with a kind of pep talk intended to put the poet in the proper frame of mind: "the beginning/must be inward. Turn inward. Divide."

It must be said that the strangeness and idiosyncrasy of Kinsella's new poetry have little to do with the *content* of his poems. His poems now are about the same things they were always about. Their themes remain the struggle for continuity and stability in the face of overwhelming erosion. "Out of Ireland," like many other poems, states it clearly enough: "We stumble/in gathering ignorance/in a land of loss/and unfulfillable desire." The focus of Kinsella's poems remains married love, the artistic act, and the history of his family and country. What is always changing is the *approach*, the ways Kinsella finds for poetry to communicate. The poems enact his explorations into the meaning of poetry, its function and uses, and the way its materials are assembled. (A section of "Out of Ireland" called "The Furnace" seeks to capture this quality: "Intensifying, as iron/melts in the furnace/—intensified into flowing fire,/aching for a containing Shape.") They demand that a reader complete the act of communication, that he be one element of the containing Shape. They invite a reader intimately into the poet's psyche, lacking order because they emerge from the psyche's chaos, from its disordered regions. To the extent that there is *song*, its melody traces the jagged line of consciousness.

This will all sound like gobbledegook unless you can see a whole poem. Quoting, however, is tricky, because the typical Kinsella poem now is either an extended fifteen-page sequence relying on angles and interconnections among its parts, or a four-hundred-plus-line extravaganza. Here is another section of "The Messenger." It occurs at the poem's end, following a deep childhood memory and preceding the moment the father's coffin emerges from chapel:

> *A cross grain of impotent anger. About it*
> *the iridescent untouchable secretions*
> *collect. It is a miracle:*
>
> *membrane and mineral in precious combination.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An eye, pale with strain, forms in the dark.
The oddity nestles in slime

functionless, in all its rarity,
purifying nothing. But nothing can befoul it
—which ought probably to console.

Kinsella's poems tell a reader very little in the normal sense of speaker-to-listener. Instead, they rely on a dynamic relationship in which the reader must participate or else the poems will simply collapse.

So *Blood and Family* is notable for several reasons. Like the periodic installments of Pound's masterwork, it both clarifies and expands what came before. Taken alone, as a separate book, it presents a decade's work by a major writer at the peak of his career, ardently pursuing his complex aesthetic. To the extent that its individual poems can be appreciated independently, the volume contains two of Kinsella's most powerful and accessible works, "The Messenger" and "St. Catherine's Clock." Further, *Blood and Family* emphasizes again that Kinsella is through with traditional poetic structure and earnestly engaged in the modernist task of making it new. Moving him still closer to his ideal, where nothing should intervene between the song and its expression, *Blood and Family* is a challenging and harsh book, by turns funny and tender, an interesting thing to read. In other words, this is The Goods.

But for a long time I've been thinking about the paradox this new work presents: it gets harder and harder to *like* Kinsella's poems, but easier and easier to *appreciate* them. This is not simply a matter of their being difficult—not even his early lyrics were easy. Rather, I think the lack of surface appeal results from Kinsella's having eschewed poetry's musical qualities in his absolute devotion to the thing being perceived, which, in his case, is an edgy, jangling psyche.

Nevertheless, the scope and originality of what he is doing are awesome. To illustrate the point more fully, perhaps *like* should be replaced by *hear*. It gets harder and harder to hear his poems. It's not just Kinsella's approach to poetry that has changed, it's his very conception of poetry's purpose as well. One doesn't listen to a Kinsella poem any more, one studies it.

This is not to say that the poems fail to communicate. They do, but in a way that may be more demanding than for readers of the *Cantos*. Neither a shelf of reference books nor an ear for music would serve a reader well with Kinsella. He suggests what the experience is like for both poet and reader in "Songs of the Psyche":

Yet it *is*
  a matter of
negative release:

of being thrown
  up out of a state of storm
into a state of peace

or sleep,
  or a dream,
or a system of dreams.

By normal process
  organic darkness,
in potentia all things,

would summon
  Self firstly into being,
a Shadow *in actu*,

an upright on a flat plain,
  a bone stirs
in first clay

and a beam of light struck
  and snaked glittering across a surface
in multi-meanings and vanishes.

Each poem is an almost overwhelming challenge to its readers. Each is an ambitious effort to "see how the whole thing works," as he said in the brilliant 1976 sequence "A Technical Supplement." With enough re-readings, and especially with adequate grounding in Kinsella's recent work, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poems eventually yield their vast richness. But it is certainly rarified work, whose appeal is limited the closer it comes to achieving its goals. The song of Thomas Kinsella is not for every audience.

This is poetry of high ambition, conceived on a grand scale and demanding the fullest engagement. Indeed, there is a feeling of urgency and importance about all Kinsella's projects—the poems, with their historical and psychological sweep reminding the reader of a less high-hat Pound; the translations, where Kinsella seems determined single-handedly to replace more than a millennium of accepted renderings; the anthologies, both *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* and the Dolmen Press's *An Duanaire, 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed* (1981), edited with characteristic independence and sweep. But still, even for one who admires the work and the man, something elemental about poetry is lost in the bargain as awe replaces deep feeling.

For me, several issues emerge from the encounter with Kinsella's newer work. It underscores that traditional poetics are somehow a critical element in communicating emotion. Stripped to most direct utterance, with nothing between the singer and the song, the poems cast their readers adrift on the stream of consciousness, seeming to grant intimacy in exchange for power. Close as they are to the poet's psyche, they seem to utter rather than to sing. I can appreciate them, work over them, and feel as though I am in touch with the poet—but I am not moved to read them aloud, not stirred by their music. I cannot feel them before I understand them.

Finally, why is Kinsella so obsessed with how to communicate? I take this to be more than just a concern with the forms of poetic expression. His love poetry, his poetry of familial and national history, and his poetry of the artistic act have now merged and in each strand the fundamental concern is that continuity is compromised. There appears to be a deep-rooted despair over not being able to bridge the boundary between self and other. At its center, Kinsella's poetry remains the work of a man exploring through words his sense of utter isolation within the self.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poems *by Elizabeth Spires & Brad Leithauser*

Worldling

In a world of souls I set out to find them.
They who first must find each other,
be each other's fate.
There, on the open road,
I gazed into each traveller's face.
Is it you? I would ask.
Are you the ones?
No, no, they said, or said nothing at all.

How many cottages did I pass,
each with a mother, a father,
a firstborn, newly swaddled, crying;
or sitting in its little chair,
dipping a fat wooden spoon
into a steaming bowl,
its mother singing it a foolish song,
One, one, a lily's my care . . . .

Through seasons I searched,
through years I can't remember,
reading the lichens and stones
as if one were marked
with my name, my face, my form.
By night and day I searched,
never sleeping, not wanting to fail,
not wanting to simply be a *star.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finally in a town like any other town,
in a house foursquare and shining,
its door wide open to the moon,
did I find them.
There, at the top of the winding stairs,
asleep in the big bed,
the sheets thrown off, curled
like question marks into each other's arms.

Past memory, I beheld them,
naked, their bodies without flaw.
It is I, I whispered.
I, the nameless one.
And my parents, spent by the dream
of creation, slept on.

—*Elizabeth Spires*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Uncle Grant

It was the trip up the Amazon
At the age of twelve that, or so
The boy's mother later insisted,
Undid his wits. How had she ever
Agreed to such a plan? She *had* resisted,
Of course, but the boy's rootless Uncle John,
Writing from a museum faraway
In Washington, and the hell-bent child
Himself, had, between them, won the day
Somehow and made her do what never
She should have done: she let the boy go.
No wonder, what with months in the wild—
Savages, the jungle, food, heat, rain—
He'd caught some fever of the brain.

Whatever the case, this boy, my great-
Uncle Grant, came home to Tennessee
And never left the farm again
For long. Deaths, heat, harvests, he stayed on,
Fished the local Amazon,
Hunted the circling hills. The farm passed
To Alfred, his older brother,
Whose consumptive wife, just twenty-three
And pregnant with her third, miscarried
Ten days before spitting up her last
Lifeblood. After a frantic month's wait,
Alfred found his children a new mother—
And, in all, he made his brother ten
Times an uncle. Grant never married.

. . . But the story's more complicated
Than this, since Grant doggedly pursued
An alternate livelihood throughout
His life. At sixteen he sent a kind
Of mash note to his mentor,
Alexander Graham Bell, whose
Avuncular, long, and long-awaited

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reply (from Nova Scotia!) closed—"Choose
Your goals with care, large and small.
Question everything, but never doubt
The resource of the human mind,
My boy." Perhaps it was this call
From Bell, and not the jungle, that skewed
Grant's wits: he became an inventor.

Which was—or was if one can tell
By results alone—the purest folly. His
Dream was of a kind of workbench El
Dorado, where the gold of free
Fancy, mined systematically
At last, would sift itself out.
Not a thing came of his labors
In the end, excepting some
Dubious family tales and—no doubt—
Much laughter for and from the neighbors.
But in the long view—as, say, from
The windows of a plane—bit
By bit his failures feed a soil that is
The richer for those who resisted it . . .

We arrived—my brother and I, each
Competingly agog with the wonder
That boyhood takes in flight—
At the Nashville Airport, there
Met by our tall Aunt Elaine, under
Whose not always watchful eye
We'd spend a month. Next day, we were met by
A list of chores, including some manure
In need of a shovel, which, to be sure,
Was a useful task—if meant to teach
Two city boys never to make light
Of earthbound employment.
Everywhere
Her farm called us with places to explore,
But it wasn't many days before

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We'd turned the lock on that old door
And clambered up some stairs to what
Still was called Grant's Laboratory.
It was a low, narrow room, a sort
Of loft above a sort of shed.
Surprisingly, a number of tools
And things still lay outspread
On the cobwebbed table—pulleys, rope, spools
Of wire, bottled powders, a score
Of nuts and bolts, a cracked retort—
The leavings of a mind caught
Up in the perpetual motion
Of the alchemist's lead-fueled notion
Of a lasting conversion to glory.

This was late afternoon. The sun
Again had turned to gold. The room's one
Window gave upon some lilac bushes
On which a dreamer's eye might fall
In those whiled hours when it seems
Unclear if he but dreams or starts to feel
The first buried birth-pushes
Of something real
And richly practical. If Grant's dreams
Were dreams, he breathed no final discontent
In his will, wherein he grandly granted "all
Fruits of my scientific industry,
Now, and in perpetuity,
To the United States Government."

—Brad Leithauser

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Music

A recital of Pollini's

by Samuel Lipman

For more than two decades now, Maurizio Pollini has been one of the most successful pianists on the international musical scene. Pollini was born in 1942 in Milan and studied in the conservatory there. In 1960 he won the Warsaw Chopin competition by acclamation, particularly impressing the renowned Arthur Rubinstein with his technical mastery. After his triumph in Warsaw, Pollini worked with the reclusive Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, a cult figure since World War II for many piano lovers. By the 1970s Pollini was esteemed not just for his virtuosity, but for the interest of his repertory; not only has Pollini played much Bach and late Beethoven, he has been assiduous (unlike so many of his colleagues) in programming—and recording—twentieth-century literature, including works by the popular Bartók and the well-known (albeit hardly popular) Schoenberg, and also by the less prestigious Hans Werner Henze and Luigi Nono.

By the 1980s, Pollini was solidly established as an artistic celebrity, occupying a secure niche in the musical life of Italy and Europe, appearing regularly at the most prestigious music festivals, touring the world, and recording extensively for Deutsche Grammophon. His playing has been seen as the quintessence of what might be called young-modern pianism: physically powerful, faithful to the text, note-accurate, straightforwardly unsentimental, dependable, intellectually penetrating, and (to use a word beloved of writers of remainder-book ads) lucid. Individually, these estimable virtues doubtless might be thought a bit prosaic. But together, they have been responsible for elevating Pollini in the public mind to the high rank of his Italian co-nationalists, conductors Riccardo Muti (the music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra) and Claudio Abbado (the late Herbert von Karajan's replacement at the head of the Berlin Philharmonic).

A recent Pollini recital, given last year at the Salzburg Festival in Austria and broadcast here this winter on National Public Radio, provides a welcome opportunity to assess this celebrated pianist's playing at the midpoint of his career. Now, just two years short of fifty, Pollini might fairly be expected at this point in his life to combine something of the exuberant technical resources of youth with the wise musical penetration that can only be the fruit of artistic and personal maturity. The Salzburg program too, in its combination of introspective Brahms, miniature Schoenberg, still-outré Stockhausen, and the most knotty and heaven-storming late Beethoven, would seem to provide a complete summation of Pollini's commitment to music for music's sake, rather than the currently fashionable platform ideal of music for the sake of the celebrity's career and the audience's entertainment.

The Brahms Pollini chose to play on this occasion was the composer's opus 119,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

written in 1892, just five years before his death in 1897. This group of four pieces, Brahms's last works for the piano, consists of an Intermezzo in B minor, an Intermezzo in E minor, yet another Intermezzo in C major, and a concluding Rhapsody in E flat major. The three Intermezzos are richly autumnal, with tenderness combined with delicacy and even fitful humor to produce a mood never far from sadness. The Rhapsody, of which the Italian tempo marking is *Allegro risoluto*, is much more outgoing, and even projects a curious triumph, as if in writing it Brahms were afraid that his adoring public might forget that in his youth he had been as much a pianist as a composer; however admissible this speculation may be, there can be little doubt that the E flat major Rhapsody today puts the performer in a position where he must project pianistic brilliance without any concession to the technical excesses always so valuable (and for many, indispensable) in conveying such brilliance. All in all, these short pieces, though romantic in feeling, are old-fashioned in the careful notation Brahms uses to make his musical intentions—in particular details of phrasing and the separation of melodic lines—absolutely clear, first to the performer and then to the listener.

At the outset it must be said that here, in this Salzburg recital, Pollini failed to provide even an adequate performance of the Brahms pieces. Whether the tempo was slow or fast, note followed note in even progression—save for altogether too many pauses, in lieu of expression, at the ends of bars. The pianist's tone was monochromatic, the pace plodding, the texture lumpish; melodies, in clear disregard of the composer's directions, were not kept distinct, and indications of phrasing and dynamics were simply ignored. As played by Pollini, the first Intermezzo, which depends for its very character as a musical work on the subordination of less important to more important material, sounded like nothing more than a dogged student's exercise in cautious piano-playing. In the second Intermezzo, Pollini made no attempt to observe Brahms's careful instructions to attach the second note of the characteristic three-note motive on which the opening is based to the third; the result was the replacement of the composer's deeply felt grace by the mechanical execution of the untalented. Pollini's performance of the third Intermezzo, marked by Brahms *Grazioso e giocoso*, continued the effect of heaviness and sameness. As a result, the *fortissimo* chords in the coda of the closing Rhapsody failed even to make their usual pianistic effect, and seemed like little more than tired bluster.

Arnold Schoenberg's *Sechs kleine Klavierstücke* ("Six Little Piano Pieces"), opus 19, came next on the program. These evocative miniatures were written in 1911—the last of the pieces is said to have been written upon Schoenberg's return home from Gustav Mahler's funeral—and represent an important way station on the composer's road to his strict twelve-tone writing of the 1920s and after. In opus 19, Schoenberg, while retaining consonant intervals, no longer used these building blocks of conventional harmony as parts of larger structures but rather as sounds-in-themselves. Thus severed from their constructive function, these familiar musical elements became individual pulsating worlds, evoking the impression of a larger reality they could not themselves possess. Eventually, in the works of Schoenberg's student and disciple Anton Webern, the tiny pieces generated by these monadic sounds became a complete music; for Schoenberg himself, the brevity of opus 19, for all its suggestiveness, marked a kind of creative aphasia, from which only his later promulgation of the laws of dodecaphony could free him.

The affective world of Schoenberg's opus 19 is, of course, that of Austro-German hyper-romanticism, at once cutting and insinuating, lush and spare, tragic and frivolous, cruelly hard and cowardly soft. For the pianist who plays them, the problem is to preserve the opposites with which they are rife, to give full voice to their abandoned self-expression and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JANE FREILICHER

March 3 through March 28, 1990

FISCHBACH GALLERY
24 WEST 57 STREET NEW YORK 212.759.2345

May 2 through June 1, 1990

Heath Gallery
416 East Paces Ferry Road, Atlanta, GA 404.262.6407

yet avoid a capitulation to formless self-indulgence; to achieve this dialectical miracle requires, strange to say, a full quota of classical discipline—the same classical discipline one needs in playing, and can only have learned from the study of, Bach and his descendants, even through Brahms.[1]

Faced with Schoenberg, Pollini quite abandoned the plodding approach that had marked his Brahms. Under his hands the Schoenberg sounded like nothing so much as far-out Debussy *Preludes*. Here was nothing of Schoenberg's Germanic acid and iron; instead, here were all the subtle charms of Debussy's lonely foghorns, tinkling buoys, and filmy veils. To convey this beguiling atmosphere of early twentieth-century French musical impressionism, Pollini mustered up an enviable repertory of sensual rhythms and pulses. In forcing Schoenberg to suggest, in the title of a 1910 Debussy *Prelude*, "Les sons et les parfums tournant dans l'air du soir" ("The sounds and scents revolve in the evening air"), Pollini thus recreated a music of languor and voluptuousness; however much of an artistic miracle such a recreation may be, in this case it seemed simply like the wrong miracle, for in the end it only added to our knowledge of Debussy, when what we lack is the experience of Schoenberg.

Pollini now moved on in his Salzburg recital to compositions by Karlheinz Stockhausen. Since the 1950s this half-mystic, half-calculating German avant-gardist has been both a leading symbol in Europe of new music and an exemplar of the contemporary composer whose music is more talked-about than performed. Though Stockhausen has often used the piano in his ensemble works, his only piano music that is at all known to the musical public is the *Klavierstücke I-XI*, written between 1952 and 1956 (but subject to con-

1 It is, as they used to say, no accident that the classic recorded performance of the Schoenberg opus 19 was that of Glenn Gould, master player of Bach—and Brahms. Gould's playing of opus 19, by the way, was once available, along with all the other Schoenberg solo piano music, on CBS LP M2S 736.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

siderable revision and reworking thereafter). Here in many ways is the culmination of post-Second World War intellectually determined composition; here also (alas for pianists and lovers of keyboard music) is the apogee of what can only be called apianistic piano-writing. These works are marked by a purely cerebral exploitation of minute differentiations of piano touch and timbre to the eye and not the ear, and of complex rhythmic directions that can only end up sounding wayward and arbitrary. The abiding character of these works is a coldness and brutality of thought, and therefore of expression. There is something quintessentially Teutonic in their rationality run amok, as if Schoenberg's tortured dialectic of intellectuality and sensuality had been resolved in favor of mind *über alles.*

At his Salzburg recital, Pollini played two parts of the *Klavierstücke*, those marked by the Roman numerals V and IX. What was so remarkable about his performance of them was the application of the same Debussy-izing principle of interpretation to Stockhausen that he had just previously applied to Schoenberg. The result was harmless, but it was a travesty. What had seemed in the Schoenberg like a mistaken, though undeniably gifted, misunderstanding of the music, now seemed, in the Stockhausen, like an attempt to sugarcoat a bitter pill for the audience. Played as if it were Debussy, with all the sweet Gallic nuances of pellucid tone and sexy rhythm, it is not too much to say that this music became the prettily embalmed corpse of Debussy, the house, as it were, in which Debussy once lived a long, long time ago.[2] If this is what it takes to make Stockhausen palatable to an audience, one can hardly be blamed for wondering whether the attempt is worthwhile.

Finally there arrived the late Beethoven—in this case the huge Sonata in B flat major, opus 106, popularly known as the "*Hammerklavier.*" The opus 106, like all of Beethoven's last five piano sonatas—the opus 101, the opus 109, the opus 110, and the opus 111—was expressly written for the pianoforte, a contraction of the full Italian name *gravicembalo col piano e forte*; in the wave of nationalism which followed upon the Napoleonic Wars, German designations were found to replace Italian, and "*Hammerklavier*"—hammer-keyboard—now became Beethoven's official name for what we now know as the piano. As a musical sobriquet, the "*Hammerklavier*" designation only stuck to the opus 106, for it has seemed, even to this day, a perfect description of the strength and force of this remarkable work: in a great performance, the "*Hammerklavier*" Sonata, for all its extended passages of sublime gentleness, really does sound like a music played by the hammers of a Greek god. The opus 106, lasting some forty-five minutes, is quite Beethoven's longest piano sonata. It provides a supreme test for every aspect of a pianist's technique: the playing of massive chords, incessant trills, close passagework, delicate filigree, carefully marked distinctions and changes of dynamic levels. In its length, compositional complexity, and (in the concluding Fugue) contrapuntal density, it makes stupendous demands not just on physical endurance but on mental comprehension. Above all, it is a supreme test of a pianist's affective musicality: all the myriad notes in the opus 106, no matter how fast they whir by, no matter how loudly they must be played, no matter how many of them are going on at the same time, and no matter how dissonantly they are combined, all of them are the purest melodies, whose contour the pianist must identify, savor, and, in the end, communicate.

Great pianists have in fact been slow to take up this challenge. The opus 106 has

2 These works of Stockhausen can be heard in all their true sound, in the standard 1965 recorded performances, made under the supervision of the composer, by the German pianist Aloys Kontarsky. The results cannot (at least in my estimation) be called beautiful, but they are straightforward and undeniably authentic. My copy of the recordings, on CBS LP 32 21 0008 (deleted), also comes with an extraordinary written description, by Stockhausen, of what the pianist ate, meal by meal, during the time he was making the recordings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MITCHELL SIPORIN
The Early Years 1930–1950

March 10–April 3

CATALOGUE AVAILABLE

BABCOCK
Galleries
Established 1852

724 Fifth Avenue, NY 10019 212 535-9355

never been a work that figured in the recitals of the greatest twentieth-century virtuosos. Hofmann and Rachmaninoff, Horowitz and Rubinstein have happily passed it by. In the 1920s and 1930s, Artur Schnabel, a musician's pianist rather than a pianist's pianist, did play the "*Hammerklavier*" as part of his complete Beethoven sonata cycles; in 1935, Schnabel made an uncharacteristically uneasy and flustered 78 RPM recording of it as part of his monumental Beethoven Sonata Society series. With the coming of the LP after the late 1940s, important performances were recorded by Egon Petri, Solomon, and Wilhelm Backhaus. More recently, with the spate of complete Beethoven sonata recordings, "*Hammerklavier*" recordings are easy to come by; in the mid-1970s, Pollini himself recorded it as part of an LP album containing the last five sonatas.[3]

Whereas Pollini's recording of some fifteen years ago now sounds tonally harsh and overbright, his Salzburg broadcast performance of the opus 106 completely reverted in mood and execution to the heaviness and dullness of the Brahms with which he had opened. Once again note ploddingly followed note; dynamic markings—observed on his recording from the 1970s—were ignored; his touch was thick and unvaried. It was hardly a question of there being wrong notes in Pollini's performance; wrong notes, and muddy passages too, are inevitable in any live performance of the "*Hammerklavier*," and in any case there weren't very many here. What was lacking, and indeed totally lacking, was either Beethoven's infectious joy in the energetic passages, and the sublimity of the quiet places so liberally strewn throughout this heavenly work. For example, Pollini seemed to trudge through the triumphant harmonic progressions of the opening *Allegro*; equally depressingly, he reduced the noble beginning of the Adagio—a movement surely

3 This recording was available on LP as Deutsche Grammophon 2709 072. A CD transfer (which I have not heard) of this performance is now available on Deutsche Grammophon 419199-2 GH2.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unmatched elsewhere in Beethoven save in the last quartets and the Ninth Symphony—and the profound decorations later in the same movement to a mechanical going through the motions. And the final Fugue, so rarely brought off even under the best conditions, not only failed to make sense as musical design: it failed in Pollini's performance even to convince, in the way it often does convince, as the rhetorical gesture of a Prometheus confronting an implacable Zeus.

Little more need be said about this recital. It may be that on this occasion Pollini was far below his best—but in that case he might well have chosen not to allow the tape to be used for broadcast. In any case, the listener is hardly in a position to make allowances. The *cachet* of Salzburg is now unmatched in music; if standards are not to be upheld at Salzburg, what can then be said about events elsewhere, where the audience is not so prosperous, the performing conditions are not so luxurious, and the mountains are not so beautiful? I am afraid that the lesson to be drawn from this regrettable concert seems plain: the highest level of music performance today, in its failure to comprehend style and to communicate beauty, leaves everything to be desired. It is not clear who is to be blamed for this failure; it is clear enough that the victim is music itself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art

Classics without commercials

by Jed Perl

Art galleries are ruled by the clock: rush, rush; the shows go up and down; "Will there be a review in the *Times* on Friday?"; then the summer hiatus; and the wondering over what to show this time next year. No doubt it is the fast-forward movement (a frenzy disrupted only by the dullness of the days when nobody comes in) that provokes certain dealers, even if their primary interest is the art of the present, to turn back the clock by showing classic or at least pre-contemporary work. Such shows have a serious point: they suggest that the road into the future can also be a road back into the past. If museums present the case that the past is ever-present, classic shows in contemporary galleries present the case that the future might just catch the tail of the past. The year is 1937 and the Galerie Pierre (2, rue des Beaux-Arts, Paris), a hotbed of surrealist activity, mounts a show of the work of Odilon Redon, a fantastical artist sometimes thought of as a proto-Surrealist. The year is 1984, and the Robert Miller Gallery (724 Fifth Avenue, New York), a showcase for contemporary expressionist figuration, exhibits the late work of de Chirico, a modernist turned antimodernist who fascinates a new generation.

In these cases, the backward glance is provoked by the dealer's contacts with contemporary artists, with their concerns. No less valuable is the gallery that devotes itself single-mindedly to spotlighting underknown aspects of the past. The year is 1960, and the Galerie Chalette goes against the Abstract Expressionist grain with a show of "Construction and Geometry in Painting: From Malevich to 'Tomorrow.'" The year is 1989 and the Rachel Adler Gallery exhibits the work of Jean Hélion, which at that moment can be seen in no museum in New York. These galleries want to find a permanent berth for the art they believe in in private collections and, ultimately, in the museums. Galleries can be freshwater springs, feeding into the museums. Ideally, everything flows, and the essential traditions are continually revitalized, broadened.

This season has so far been a remarkable one for exhibitions of modern art—both in the museums and in the galleries. By the time that "Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism," one of the great shows of the age, closed at the Museum of Modern Art in mid-January, people were so used to thinking of its being there that they felt bereft. William Rubin had done what he does best, sublimely. He presented orthodox modernism as a gloriously transparent tradition. He laid out the heroic days of Cubism with such clarity and delicacy that we could all go through the show in our own ways and come out with our own conclusions. We're all in Rubin's debt. Around this essential experience—it's the silver and gold masterpiece at the center of this season's treasure house of modern exhibitions—other, smaller but also distinguished events have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

occured. Over at the Metropolitan there have been two top-notch shows. In "Pierre Bonnard: The Graphic Art" we witnessed, step by step, the artist's passage from the naturalistic vignette beloved of *fin de siècle* illustrators to his own casually unaffected version of the grand manner. Meanwhile, the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection, itself rich in Bonnards, and in Braques, Picassos, and Matisses too, had the effect of setting the history of Cubism that was being told over at the Modern back into the broader School of Paris context. A few blocks away, Salander-O'Reilly Galleries supplied the prehistory of modernism, in its dream-perfect show of Constable and Delacroix (with a soupçon of Rubens, a master whom not only Delacroix but also Constable had studied very closely). Up at Helen Serger's La Boetie, a small show of Matisse drawings that she had meant as an homage to her old friend Pierre Matisse, who died last summer, became a memorial to a generation of dealers when Mme Serger died last fall. The new Gallerie Taménaga on Madison Avenue presented a good exhibition of the underappreciated Vlaminck. The Philippe Daverio Gallery, late of West Twenty-third Street, opened on East Fifty-seventh Street with a wonderful anthology of its specialty, twentieth-century Italian art. This little sketch for a history of Italian art from Boldini to de Chirico was better outlined and more deeply felt than the Italian art extravaganza mounted in London last season. Jan Krugier exhibited modern sculpture, in a single room packed tight with magnificent things by Brancusi, Arp, Picasso, Julio Gonzáles, and many others. Pace presented Joseph Cornell; Zabriskie, Leon Hartl and Turku Trajan; a show of jewelry by modern artists at Herstand was an interesting idea, though poorly realized. Here are some of my impressions.

Salander-O'Reilly's double show (Constable in one room, Delacroix in another) carried us back to the Salon of 1824, when Constable first exhibited in Paris, and Delacroix had the close encounter with English landscape painting that would lead him, and then all of Paris, into the radical confrontations with nature and tradition that inaugurated the Parisian century of miracles. Delacroix is a very difficult artist to appreciate anywhere except in the Louvre. I can't think of another painter whose effects are so closely linked to the actual size of his work. The strange croppings of forms (the cut-off horse at the lower left of *The Death of Sardanapalus* [1827]; the cut-off flag at the top of *Liberty Leading the People* [1830]) feel inevitable and expansive at full scale, and yet can look not only reduced but also eccentric and arbitrary in reproduction. Gathering together small paintings, oil sketches, drawings, and prints from public and private collections, Salander-O'Reilly somehow managed to convey some of the amplitude and grandeur of Delacroix's art. This canny selection underlined the centrifugal nature of Delacroix's compositions, their paradoxical combination of weightiness and boundlessness. I treasure in particular the *Jewess of Algiers* (1852), from a private collection. Seen under natural light, this little figure took on some of the monumentality of a Mesopotamian Gudea.

Michael O'Brian, director of La Boetie, included in his show of Matisse drawings two pencil sketches from one 1928 session. In both drawings we see the same two models lounging amidst the same cushions, the same low chair. *Deux femmes assises* is dominated by a figure that stretches all across the page and draws our eyes up to the right and back into space; the other model, sitting at the left with her arms encircling her knees, is by comparison self-contained, inward-turning. In the second drawing, *Odalisque et femme nue*, the outstretched nude is now seen from the back, still angling sharply to the right, while the second figure, leaning against the little chair, pulls our eyes in the opposite direction, out of the upper left corner of the paper. In the first drawing the two models, their heads neatly balanced to the left and right of the page, both gaze into an empty foreground where their gazes—or perhaps it is the trajectory of their gazes—meet, as if in midair. In the second

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drawing the forward gaze of the model on the left is balanced by the denial of the face of the model on the right (almost the whole head is eclipsed by the shoulders). In both drawings the geometric play of mirror images and left/right divisions and implied diagonals is opposed to the stately curves of hip and thigh and belly and breast. Taken together, these two drawings reveal much about the working processes of the studio, the here and there and back and forth by which the artist tracks the figures as they make their space: opening space up and closing it down; compressing and decompressing.

The large Joseph Cornell show at the Pace Gallery, consisting mainly of white boxes from the Fifties, was opulently presented. At first I was put off by the sight of a gallery papered in blue rice paper to give it the effect of some sort of exotic stone. Yet there was something beguiling about this deluxe installation: it brought out the glamour factor in Cornell's art, and heated up the atmosphere around these atmosphere-laden assemblages just enough. Perhaps it is time to admit that Cornell's is a likeable and extravagantly decorative sensibility. The stories of his asceticism, of his strange life out in Queens, tend to disguise the fact that he was first and last a man of his time. His idiosyncratic mix of constructivism and surrealism and romanticism is not so much a personal dream as it is the collective dream of the New York art scene of the 1940s and 1950s. Every artist had Europe on his mind. Everybody wanted to get over Europe. The art reproductions and souvenirs of little French hotels that fill Cornell's boxes are fragments of a retreating dream, a dream seen through the blue and white mists of the Atlantic, a dream from which America would have to wake up in order to become itself. No wonder ballet was key for Cornell. At the hands of Balanchine, this nineteenth-century romantic art form was becoming, before New York's very eyes, the vehicle for the greatest of all American adventures in high modernism. Cornell is a nonpareil archaeologist of the modern movement, the master of his own decidedly unscientific methodologies.

In the section of the rather grand catalogue of the Gelman Collection that is devoted to provenances, one can study the essential role played by certain important galleries in the formation of a great collection. The Gelmans were lucky enough to buy some of their paintings from galleries that had obtained work directly from the artists—this is the case with many of their Braques, which came from Galerie Maeght in Paris. A number of the Matisses went directly from Mme Matisse to Pierre Matisse's gallery and then to the Gelmans. Other provenances offer charming vistas of modern art. The Paul Klee was purchased at the Buchholz Gallery by the painter George L. K. Morris, a key member of the American Abstract Artists group; from there it went to another private collector, then to the Marlborough Gallery, and then to the Gelmans. The Picasso *Head of a Woman* (1927) was bought at the Galerie Pierre in Paris in 1938 by the painter Wolfgang Paalen, a surrealist who showed at Galerie Pierre, founded the magazine *Dyn* in Mexico, and published a book of essays called *Form and Sense* (1945). The Gelmans, who lived in Mexico, where Jacques had made a fortune in the movie business, bought the Picasso straight from Paalen.

It is not surprising, given the rich social history that can be read between the lines of these provenances, that the collection presents a view of modern art that is lively and unpredictable—that is passionate. I was glad to see Bonnard, Matisse, Picasso, and Léger at various points in their careers; and to see them in the company of Miró, Giacometti, and Balthus. I don't care for the paintings of Yves Tanguy, nor do the works of Modigliani, Dali, and Ernst engage me especially. Yet the installation of the Gelman Collection in three rooms at the Met felt coherent. In one way or another, all the works in the collection reflect the shifts in consciousness that rocked Paris in the half century between Impressionism and Surrealism. Many of the artists included either

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

instigated or were among the first to respond to those shifts in consciousness. If the Gelman Collection has a subject, it is the many ways in which nature is transformed in the art of the School of Paris. Those transformations, seen in all their variety, make an irregular yet beautiful pattern, a pattern that is all the more beautiful for its irregularities.

Looking at the half dozen or so works each by Matisse or Braque, one sees different aspects of a career (and perhaps they are also different facets of a personality). Matisse is revealed in four phases: the Fauve mosaic-work of the *Still Life with Vegetables* (1905-06), where the leap from naturalistic observation into pictorial exaggeration is a matter of many tiny moves; the consolidation of Matisse's kaleidoscopic color into the reduced designs of *The Young Sailor II* (1906) and *View of Collioure* (1907-08); the introduction of a full spatial illusionism into a space that is constructed out of antinaturalistic color in *Odalisque, Harmony in Red* (1926-27); the development of a space that is generated from natural principles rather than from natural appearances in the paper cutout *Snow Flowers* (1951). Braque, too, is seen in four phases: the decomposition of the old spatial illusionism into the new pictorial illusionism that is Analytical Cubism (and so we're back at "Pioneering Cubism" at MOMA); and then the classical, mannerist, and expressionist phases that Braque's Cubism passes through in the next half century in three exemplary works, *Still Life with a Guitar* (1924), *The Billiard Table* (1944-52), and that sublimely eccentric masterpiece *The Garden Chair* (1947-60).

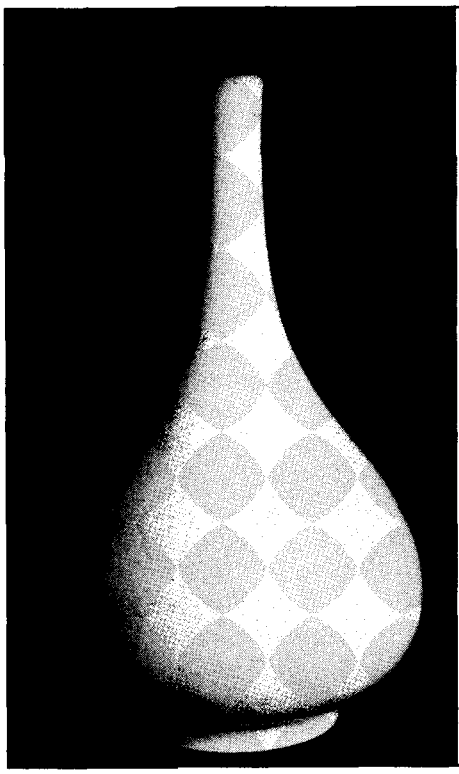
Picasso, Bonnard, and Miró are likewise presented in the round. And some of the artists who are less fully represented are no less well represented. Here is Giacometti's fine 1961 portrait of *Annette*, and several painted bronzes. Neither of the Balthuses in the Gelman Collection would be in my Balthus Top Ten. *Thérèse Dreaming* (1938) is a tour de force that is perhaps too much a matter of willed effects to resolve into a masterpiece. The 1957 *Girl at a Window*, which shows Balthus in one of his self-consciously quiet moods, is interesting for its recapitulation of the Biedermeier conceit of the girl seen from the back looking out the window. The painting is about the girl's consciousness of the landscape, a consciousness expressed through the poetically licensed idea of reversing aerial perspective, so that the distant landscape is more fully realized than the interior foreground.

All in all, the Gelman Collection has a happy logic. I am not the only visitor who found that it all fit into place while I was in the galleries. Afterward, the collection retains a mysterious unity, a unity that has to do with our seeing it all through the eyes of the Gelmans, and boy do they have *eyes*.

Last December, I received a letter from the painter Albert Kresch in which he explained how "irked and infuriated" he was at the Sotheby's sales the previous spring, "which had the Met, the Philadelphia Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Cincinnati Museum, and the Hirshhorn dumping (for their own inscrutable reasons?) (to purchase late-twentieth-century 'art') great Matisses, Renoirs, Soutines, Segonzacs, Picassos, Arps, Rouaults, and other superb paintings .... And did they ever look good. And that's only *one* sale .... The depletion (ransacking) of the nation's major museums' and galleries' artistic patrimony continues unabated (is accelerating)."

I share Kresch's concerns. There is a winnowing process going on in the museums. This is merely ill-considered or downright sinister—opinions differ. Many museums are deaccessioning works that are found to be inconsistent with the current taste of the curatorial staff; and—presto!—modern art looks utterly homogeneous. Kresch (who paints dark, somber, panoramic landscapes) is one of the many artists whose needs are not being served by our museums. (His letter was inspired by anxieties over the future integrity of the Barnes Collection in Merion, Pennsylvania, a treasure house of unfashionable moderns, such as the late Renoir, which some fear may

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"Tour de Force:
Nobody does the Met
like Paul Magriel."
—Jed Perl, *Vogue*

A CONNOISSEUR'S
GUIDE TO THE MET

THE BEST OF THE
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
IN FOUR 1-HOUR TOURS

By Paul Magriel
and John T. Spike

Now at bookstores.
VINTAGE BOOKS
A Random House Company

be a future victim of the de-accessioning binge). The problem is not simply that some painters and members of the museum-going public prefer Rouault to Rothko, or may want to see a broader representation of the constructivist tradition exemplified by painters like Joaquim Torrès-Garcia and Auguste Herbin. The problem is that the American public, including the artists, is being denied the full disclosure of modern art.

Yet the events of the past months may suggest that the hyped-up art market of the past decade cuts two ways. Galleries that want to cash in on the boom in modern masters may find that it's to their advantage to engage in a healthy historical dialogue. And museums that are jockeying for major collections may be willing to accept works (such as the Gelman Rouault) that they would not dream of actually going out to buy. (Nor could they afford them.) With prices for modern art now out of sight, we may never be able to return to the days when people of moderate wealth could collect it. This is an unfortunate development, as it drastically reduces the already tiny number of people who can engage in the historical dialogue as collectors. (Contemporary art, despite the astronomical prices at some galleries, remains affordable, with small but beautiful works by significant artists available for one or two thousand dollars.) Some of the prices at Jan Krugier's sculpture show were startling, in the multimillions; and yet the Krugier show, which was open to the public free of charge, was a public service. Some galleries relatively new to New York such as Krugier and Daverio and Salander-O'Reilly—as well as certain older ones such as Washburn and Zabriskie—don't just sell rarities at high prices; they also enrich the art life of the city through their exhibitions, many of which are beautifully selected and presented. Many of these galleries also uphold a high standard of scholarship and connoisseurship: their clients demand it.

The revelations that the private galleries offer the public are yet another reminder of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

how hopelessly out-of-date all the old definitions of populist and elitist are when it comes to the arts. These galleries may be driven by the almighty dollar, but they're community-minded as well. By the same token, it sometimes seems that the old "elitist" museums, where anyone could go into the empty galleries and feel like the prince in his palace, were a heck of a lot more "populist" than the new audience-friendly museums, where you can barely get through the front door for the crush of the crowds.

In a beautiful essay in the catalogue of the Gelman Collection, Pierre Schneider remarks on how "[b]etween the studio and the museum, the work traverses a number of situations"—he's thinking of collectors, but also of dealers. Later on, he speaks of "a chain of solicitude" that accompanies the work to the point where, with luck, it is viewed "as a moment in art history, a product and a producer of influences, a link in the concatenation of which the museum seeks, through the diversity and presentation of its collections, to serve as a convincing equivalent." But how difficult it is to maintain a diversity of collections and of presentations that really does justice to history. (The question is always, "Whose history?") Obviously, the complete view must be gleaned from diverse sources. And obviously it becomes harder to do this as museums auction off parts of their collections. Now that the Guggenheim, which under Thomas Messer did some important historical shows, has fallen victim to a terminal hipness that is really just a kind of terminal hardening of the arteries, it could be that William Lieberman at the Metropolitan will produce the honorable and essential opposition to the Museum of Modern Art's own honorable history of modern art. Lieberman will never be able to transcend the truly awful design of the Lila Acheson Wallace Wing (how could anyone build on a site on Central Park and fail to produce painting galleries with natural light?); but Lieberman's presentation of, say, the later Braque suggests that he may offer some of what MOMA prefers not to offer. At MOMA we can look forward, at least in the near future, to more great moments in high modernism: "Matisse in Morocco" arrives in summer 1990. Meanwhile, the private galleries are filling in some of the missing pieces, putting on extraordinary shows and welcoming the public—the artist public and the general public, too. Without the work the private galleries have done over the past few years, how much less we would know of Arp, Derain, Hélion, Torrès-Garcia, Elie Nadelman, Burgoyne Diller, Earl Kerkam, Arnold Friedman. This season, we've been feasting on the classics. And the classics would not be on display if there weren't a public that loved them. This is a sign of hope.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

Ruined squire

by Robert Richman

It was inevitable that the curtailed life of Sidney Keyes (1922-1943), the English poet who was killed in action in World War II at the age of twenty, would become the substance of legend and myth. Like nearly everyone who has come recommended as a "war poet"—a dubious designation that is often invoked to lend a moral edge to a writer whose work cannot stand up well in poetic terms—Keyes has long been a hostage of the literary mythmakers. These mythmakers have succeeded in transforming him and his work into symbols of the loss and devastation of war.

Even Keyes's friend and editor Michael Meyer, who has been the poet's unstinting champion since their days together at Oxford, is culpable of furthering the Keyes legend. In the memoir that introduces *The Collected Poems,* a book first published in 1945 and now reissued in an expanded edition,[1] Meyer refers to Keyes as the "spokesman of the conscript," the poet who "articulat[ed] the dumb courage of a generation." Keyes was never the spokesman of anything—except, perhaps, poetry. It is a pity his poems have been subordinated to the symbolical value of his death; he certainly has been, in the words of the scholar Linda M. Shires, "enshrined" by the critics as the war's "sacrificial victim."[2]

It is useless, at this date, to lament the loss of all the poetry Keyes might have written had he survived. (An exact contemporary of Philip Larkin's, Keyes would have been sixty-eight in May.) What we should be concerned with is the value of the poems we have: 110 in all, including juvenilia and light verse. And yet it isn't easy to assess a body of work that has been encased for so long in such an elaborate myth. Unfortunately, Keyes was perfect fodder for the traffickers in legend. For one thing, he was precocious, and was writing poetry of quality at the age of sixteen. Subsequently, at Oxford, he became a leader of the wartime poetry revival there, a revival that also included, among others, Drummond Allison, Keith Douglas, and John Heath-Stubbs. These poets, whose work was featured in *Eight Oxford Poets*, the 1941 anthology edited by Keyes and Meyer, had a mission: to overthrow the didacticism that had dominated English poetry in the Thirties, and to install in its place verse of a more metaphysical and visionary strain.[3] W. H.

1 *The Collected Poems of Sidney Keyes,* edited, with a memoir and notes, by Michael Meyer; Routledge, 140 pages, $11.95 paper.

2 *British Poetry of the Second World War*, by Linda M. Shires, was published by St. Martin's Press in 1985.

3 A notable omission from *Eight Oxford Poets* is Philip Larkin, whose disapproval of Keyes is suggested in Larkin's introduction to the 1966 reissue of *The North Ship*. Larkin's attitude may be attributed mainly to a difference of sensibility between Keyes and himself. It may also be due to an understandable envy over Keyes's immediate success. As Linda M. Shires points out, "Larkin and Kingsley Amis developed more slowly and were possibly irritated by the dominating Queen's [College] group." A few of Larkin's poems did eventually appear in William Bell's 1944 collection *Poetry from Oxford in Wartime.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Auden, the leader of the Thirties' poets, declared in his essay "Writing" that poetry's "ulterior purpose" is to tell the truth, "to disenchant and disintoxicate." What interested Keyes's Oxford group was a different sort of truth than what Auden set out to show: a more private internal truth, a truth that was indeed often best communicated by enchanting and intoxicating means. During his Oxford years Keyes had been signed up by Routledge for a book of poems. He ended up preparing two volumes for his publisher, *The Iron Laurel* (1942) and *The Cruel Solstice* (1943).

Keyes's precocity was absolutely indispensable to the advancement of myth; but so was his brooding Romantic persona. This persona was enhanced at Oxford by Keyes's well-publicized love affair with the art student Milein Cosmann. In addition, Keyes was anemic. This gave him, as Michael Meyer recalls, "rather sallow" skin, a thin face, and a highly "prominent . . . nose and cheekbones." In short, he looked like a corpse. What really secured Keyes's status as a legend, however, was that he was often plagued by morbid thoughts, or so it has been claimed by some of those who knew him at Oxford. (James Lucas, whose memoir "Sidney Keyes as a Soldier" is included in the new *Collected Poems*, adds his voice to the chorus. Lucas informs us that his commander was "very interested in the types of beetles that infested the body of a dead, wolf-like dog that lay unburied near our platoon positions.")

Keyes's avowed absorption with death has been manipulated especially brazenly to promote the Keyes mystique. Meyer remarks in his memoir that his friend "had either inherited or been infected with a sense of guilt and of evil destiny. The subject of pain and death fascinated him." A selective reading of Keyes's poetry—one that focuses on such poems as "Nocturne in Four Voices," "The Wilderness," and "The Foreign Gate"—does indeed corroborate Meyer's depiction of Keyes as an apostle of death. However, such a reading ignores the large number of poems that treat other themes, many of which were written after Keyes's induction into the army. And yet one is obliged to note that, even if all the poems that discredit Keyes's supposed fondness for death didn't exist, one would be hard put to make much of the isolated group of poems that Meyer and others have dwelled on. These poems contain little more than the residue of adolescent impulses and proclivities that Keyes had all but rid himself of by the time he joined the army.

Given the perception of Keyes as a poet half in love with death, especially with the idea of his own death, it is no wonder that his demise on a Tunisian battlefield has seen by some as a grotesque form of wish fulfillment. It is also unfortunate, given the intentions of the mythmakers, that the facts surrounding Keyes's death are shrouded in mystery. Evidently no one from Keyes's regiment witnessed his death (at least, no one who witnessed it has come forward), and no record exists of his having been taken prisoner. No burial report was ever made, and for a period after his disappearance Keyes's actual fate was unknown. However, some months after his vanishing, there was discovered in the North African desert a cross bearing Keyes's name. But when the British Graves Service exhumed the remains, no personal effects were found. Thus no positive identification could be made.

Given the details of Keyes's life and death—and how prone they have been to irresponsible judgments—it is one of the more pleasing incongruities of literary history that Keyes's verse is as far from being war poetry as anything written under the circumstances of war can be. Reading through Meyer's expanded edition of *The Collected Poems* (which contains thirteen additional poems, a new preface by Meyer, and Lucas's memoir), one is amazed by how few of the poems even mention war. Most of the poems written after Keyes's call-up could have been written in Timbuktu, Fiji, or Toledo, Ohio.

One such poem is "The Gardener," composed in July 1942, when Keyes was still in training. And yet the poem evinces nothing of what Keyes, in the letter to Milein Cosmann that accompanied the original draft of the poem, called the "utter futility, destructiveness and emptiness" of army life:

> If you will come on such a day
> As this, between the pink and yellow lines

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of parrot-tulips, I will be your lover.
My boots flash as they beat the silly gravel.
O come, this is your day.

Were you to lay your hand like a veined
leaf
Upon my square-cut hand, I would caress
The shape of it, and that would be enough.
I note the greenfly working on the rose.
Time slips between my fingers like a leaf.

Do you resemble the silent pale-eyed angels
That follow children? Is your face a flower?
The lovers and the beggars leave the park—
And still you will not come. The gates are
closing.

O it is terrible to dream of angels.

Many readers, particularly those who find the idea of war poetry appealing, may view this poem as a serious dereliction of duty on the part of Platoon Commander Keyes. After all, if a poet is a soldier—so goes the common wisdom—then soldiering should be his subject. And yet "The Gardener" is an unabashed dream of love, full of clashing images and shifting moods that indicate the presence of a vigorous poetic intelligence. In the poem, the speaker envisions meeting his lover "on such a day / As this." However, the wished-for lover, as Keyes writes in the penultimate line, "will not come." (The reluctant one was Milein Cosmann, to whom the poem was sent.) Harsh reality, in the form of another person's will, breaks in to end the lover's joyful dream.

"The Gardener" contains something else besides the sure sign of a poetic gift. This is the suggestion that the truths that matter most to this poet—in this case, a wish for love that persists despite great obstacles—lie deep within the consciousness, and that these truths are not necessarily given their proper due in a simple register or account of the prevailing external conditions. An account of the surfaces of reality, of course, is exactly what most war poetry involves. Such accounts are also what Auden expected of poetry: and indeed Keyes's poem is the kind of highly subjective poetic response to experience that was bound to antagonize Auden and his associates.

In "The Gardener," Keyes rose above what were decidedly barren external circumstances to write a poem that is a worthy addition to English literature. Keyes performed a similar feat of transcendence in "The Promised Landscape," which was written two months after "The Gardener." "The Promised Landscape" actually does rely on images of war—among others, the image of a soldier. But once again Keyes has little to say about actual soldiering, war in general, or his own experiences as an enlisted man. What he does convey is another wish for love—one that, as in the previous poem, is foredoomed to remain a wish:

How shall I sing for you—
Sharing only
The scared dream of a soldier:
A young man's unbearable
Dream of possession?
How shall I sing for you
With the foul tongue of a soldier?

We march through new mountains
Where crows inhabit
The pitiful cairns.
At morning, the rock-pools
Are matted with ice.
But you are the mountains
And you the journey.

We lie in a ruined farm
Where rats perform
Marvels of balance
Among the rafters.
And rain kisses my lips
Because you are the sky
That bends always over me.

How shall I sing for you
Knowing only
The explorer's sorrow,
The soldier's weariness?
New ranges and river
Are never quite revealing
Your promised figure.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How dare I sing for you
I the least worthy
Of lovers you've had:
You the most lovely
Of possible landscapes?

The soldier—bedeviled by "scared dreams," a "foul tongue," and an "unbearable / Dream of possession"—is clearly a symbol of Keyes himself. The soldier articulates Keyes's own desire for the "promised figure" of love, a figure that is "never quite reveal[ed]." The poem is dedicated to Renée-Jane Scott, the woman to whom Keyes attached his affections, such as they were, after he relaxed his grip on Milein Cosmann. (Renée-Jane had been Milein's roommate.) As in "The Gardener," the dream of love the poem spells out remains just that, an unfulfilled dream. But here the force keeping the pair apart is not the reluctance of the object of Keyes's desire, as it is in "The Gardener," but Keyes himself, who feels unworthy of Renée-Jane's affection.

What "The Gardener" and "The Promised Landscape" reveal is a mind that was haunted, not with death—that is absurd—but with the promise of love and companionship. The truth is, however, that Keyes was unable to love anyone, and he made it extremely difficult for anyone to love him. One doesn't want to blame Keyes for this: his emotional handicaps are almost expected of someone so young. But understanding Keyes's emotional turmoil is important in understanding his poetry. Keyes apparently had impossibly high expectations of others—so high that after a few disappointments he would refuse to become enmeshed in the compromises and obligations that friendship and love demand. When he did find himself entangled, as he did with Milein, he pressed the other party to adapt entirely to his wishes. John Guenther, in his brief but superb biography of Keyes,[4] reports that Milein "felt that [Keyes] was making her into a symbol and seeing in her all kinds of things he wished to be there." In fact Keyes had cautioned Milein in the poem "Not Chosen" that his "love will bring you nothing but trouble, my dear."

The situation with Renée-Jane Scott was only slightly different. Following the ordeal with Milein, Keyes concluded that lovers were for him far too impulsive and unpredictable—too much their own individual selves, really—for him ever to hope of abiding them. So he chose simply to distance himself from Renée-Jane. In a notebook entry from October of 1942, one month after he wrote "The Promised Landscape," Keyes speculated whether "it [would] be better . . . to stop [his relationship with Renée-Jane] now, to tell her that she is wasting her time and resources [with me], to refuse to talk about a different life, to withdraw?" And in a letter to Renée-Jane, Keyes declared that "The thought of anyone becoming my wife seems slightly farcical, even to me. It will always be so. I am afraid it would be (for the woman) rather like being married to a stone or a tree, as I believe some kinds of Indian priestesses or Vestals are."

And yet it wasn't just prospective lovers that Keyes kept at bay. There were times in Keyes's life when he seemed to want to reject the physical world in all its forms—when he imagined nothing less than, as he wrote in "Anarchy," bringing forth "A great cold passion to destroy the earth." In one letter to Milein Cosmann, which is also quoted by Guenther, Keyes no doubt forever set in the tablets of her mind his inhospitableness to the corporeal world by choosing his body as an example: "I am not a man but a voice," he wrote. "My only justification is my power of speaking clearly. Therefore it doesn't matter in the least what happens to my body."

In an entry in his wartime notebook—also quoted by Guenther[5]—Keyes attempted to

4 *Sidney Keyes: A Biographical Inquiry* was published in 1967 by London Magazine Editions.

5 The extract is also found in *Minos of Crete: Plays and Stories*, by Sidney Keyes, edited by Michael Meyer, published by Routledge in 1948. This volume contains selections from Keyes's notebook and letters, along with some (then) unpublished poems.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decipher the sources of his deep misgivings about the world. The extract also reveals why Keyes came to regard poetry as a kind of trouble-free empire where the whole deserted sensual world might be recovered:

> In [childhood's] summers [Keyes wrote] it was possible to be in love without any definite focus of desire: at the mysterious beginning of puberty the excitement of the strange *reality* of physical love could surround everything at once, without the need for possession. One could, in fact, possess the whole sensual world and something more, quite without effort or the necessity for physical affirmation. It was possible, therefore, to be a poet without all this dishonest striving with words.
>
> Later, one loses the world, and most people never try to regain it; or wish to do so, but cannot find the means. But the poet is continually seeking to enter into his old possessions, by an artificial means: he is attempting to trick words into restoring what he has lost, like a ruined squire who tries to regain by lawsuits what once came to him by right, and was a part of his own personality and a suffix to his very name.
>
> No one can find peace, who imagines love to be merely the desire to own certain objects. Yet it is impossible not to love in this way, since all love is largely physical. To me, it cannot be other wise. One's adult life and its whole system of thought seems to be based on the fallacy that it is possible to get possession of things—even abstract things like fame or salvation. But we cannot own these, any more than the bodies of women that were not made for us. The desire to create poems or children is only a variation of this—a child or a work of art is merely an apparently independent part of the world, which we can believe without much difficulty to be also a part of ourselves.

Keyes was caught between the ardent desire to possess the world and the bitter knowledge that it couldn't be done. This was what he referred to, in "The Promised Landscape," as the soldier's "unbearable / Dream of possession." He reflected on his quandary in a letter to Milein of June 21, 1942. "At this moment," Keyes wrote, "I would like to reject the whole outer world even to destroy it; another time, I feel something resembling physical desire for it . . . . The right way lies between these two; until I can find it, this acute unrest will continue."

In a sense, then, there *is* a war being chronicled in these poems. However, the war that mattered to Keyes was unrelated to the conflict that was overwhelming the world. It had to do with the struggle that was going on in his mind between the part of him that wished to own, in his words, "the bodies of women not made for us" and the part of him that knew that it was a desperate dream. "We must create our peace, our war is private," wrote Keyes in the poem called "Letter to M.C., 31.*vii*.41"; and it was true.

However, there was a solution to the dilemma that perplexed Keyes, and that solution lay in poetry. For it was in verse that Keyes's "unbearable / Dream of possession" could be enacted without the damaging consequences such possession entailed in real life. The single place where Keyes's fantasy of untrammelled ownership could be tolerated was on the page: "Our peace, our poem," wrote Keyes in "For Milein, 1.*xii*.41."

This was the encouraging side of Keyes's predicament. The dispiriting side was a life full of resented and resentful lovers who could never endure Sidney Keyes's "dream of possession." No wonder Keyes mortified Milein Cosmann and Renée-Jane Scott. "Love is to me," wrote Keyes in a letter to Cosmann, "like everything else, a sort of battle, and one that never brings any victory, but only unrest and passion."

Some might argue that Keyes's attraction to symbolism as a poetic technique is the natural aesthetic response for someone so apprehensive about the world. (Keyes, who liked to number among his influences Yeats, Hölderlin, Rilke, and the French Symbolists, once observed to Michael Meyer: "All I know is that everything in a vague sort of way means something else, and I desperately

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

want to find out *what*.") However, symbolism is not the automatic preference of every poet who ever voiced any disenchantment with reality. And anyway, Keyes's poetry is never portentously vague or obscure. If anything, his inclination in life to eschew the objects of the world seems not to have affected his poems in the slightest. In fact, Keyes seems to have made a special effort to reserve a space in his poems, right alongside the symbols, for the objects of the world—the same objects he had been inclined to banish from his life.

"The Kestrels" shows just this blend of symbols and reality:

> When I would think of you, my mind holds only
> The small defiant kestrels—how they cut
> The raincloud with sharp wings, continually circling
> Above a storm-rocked elm, with passionate cries.
> It was an early month. The plow cut hard.
> The may was knobbed with chilly buds. My folly
> Was great enough to lull away my pride.
>
> There is no virtue now in blind reliance
> On place or person or the forms of love.
> The storm bears down the pivotal tree, the cloud
> Turns to the net of an inhuman fowler
> And drags us from the air. Our wings are clipped.
> Yet still our love and luck lies in our parting:
> Those cries and wings surprise our surest act.

The central symbols here—the "small defiant kestrels"—represent, of course, the ever-defiant Milein. Milein's recalcitrance has the expected result: the alienation of the lover who resolves that there "is no virtue now in blind reliance / On place or person or the forms of love." And yet, Keyes's characteristic retreat from love to seclusion is counterbalanced by the sheer amount of gritty physical detail in the poem. All those precise, sharply etched details—the hard-cutting plow, the chilly buds, the storm-rocked elm, the rainclouds cut by the kestrels' wings—seem to denote a wish on Keyes's part to compensate for the withdrawal from life that the speaker recommends. This strategy lends the poem more than just aesthetic poise and balance. It also shows how much Keyes loved all the unmastered things of the world.

In a review in *The Spectator* of the first edition of Keyes's *Collected Poems*, Harold Nicolson wrote: "It is sometimes said that this war, like the last, has produced no outstanding poet. I doubt whether this is a correct assertion. The poetry of Sidney Keyes, for instance, is certainly valuable poetry; once we have had time to assimilate it, we may pronounce its value to be great." Nicolson's estimation of the poems was on the mark: Keyes was, with Keith Douglas, writing some of the best poetry in wartime England. But Nicolson's contention that the war *produced* Keyes is mistaken. Sidney Keyes was a full-fledged poet before the war began. The war neither advanced nor hindered his progress. All the factors that compelled him to write were in place and functioning long before he ever laid eyes on the glinting North African desert. One feels that Keyes would have written well wherever he was and whatever the circumstances: even, perhaps, as an emotionally stable adult.

A privileged man

Don Bachardy and James P. White, editors
Where Joy Resides: A Christopher Isherwood Reader. Introduction by Gore Vidal. Michael di Capua Books/Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 408 pages, $25

reviewed by David Pryce-Jones

Where Joy Resides is intended to be an anthology of the best of Christopher Isherwood's writing. The volume includes his novellas *Prater Violet* (1945) and *A Single Man* (1964), well-thumbed sections from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Goodbye to Berlin (1939), half a dozen more or less self-contained extracts from other books, and nothing from *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935), nor from *Christopher and His Kind* (1977), his revealing *envoi*. It is like opening a cupboard of old clothes once in fashion but now moth-balled, without occasion for future wear. Contrary to the pretensions of the title, there is no joy here.

Having grown up in England after the last war, I am able to recall how pervasive the Isherwood mystique then was. It was a legacy from the Thirties, a phenomenon peculiar to its time and place. With W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender, he had formed a mutual admiration society, and Cyril Connolly, Somerset Maugham, and E. M. Forster were among those who proclaimed him the hope of English fiction. Whenever he published a book, the critics would repeat that it might be a trifle slight but his next was certain to be great. No other contemporary writer was so petted and indulged. Invariably his prose style was praised for making no demands upon the reader, but nobody cared to inquire further if that was a sufficient basis for the extravagant claims made on its behalf.

What friends and well-wishers were inwardly expecting was a coherent answer to the main question addressed by Isherwood (and by most of them, too): How in the politically and socially challenging circumstances of the period to go on enjoying privileges of birth and education while appearing to disclaim them? Naturally there is no answer: this is a circle which cannot be squared. Fact and fiction were blended for purposes of deceiving the reader into suspending moral judgment when knowledge of reality would make such judgment obligatory. "I am a camera" had no sort of truth. As though it were his natural right, Isherwood simply declared that he deserved special license to do as he pleased. This was privilege in its most traditional form, and perpetuating it in the modern world proved to be Isherwood's specialty, the comprehensive subject matter of his small but consistent output. Those who encouraged him had a keen eye on similar privilege for themselves.

Born into a prosperous and well-connected family in Cheshire, Isherwood was numbered among those who had a stake in the country, as he liked to boast. The family manor house dated back to the seventeenth century. His mother and nanny remained devotedly loyal to him. At school, or later at Cambridge, he met Auden and Spender and Edward Upward and others in what became a coterie. Some rich uncle could be relied on to give him a private income; some influential friend was always ready to bail him out of trouble or to buy him a ticket for travelling. This background projected him effortlessly into the closed ranks of the privileged.

Unfortunately, the privileged in England between the wars were an undeserving crew, narrow-minded, philistine, and so frightened by the 1914 war and Communism that they were prepared to make allowance for whoever might save their skins, Hitler included. Isherwood's early writing takes the position that no sensitive youth could possibly allow himself to turn into one of these grown-ups. The Test, The Enemy, and The Other are favorite metaphors for putting distance between himself and those among whom he well realizes that he belongs.

One conceivable escape from the predicament was to go beyond playing verbal games about The Enemy and to join the Communist cause. But Communism in practice was certain to cut out rich uncles and private incomes and free tickets, and Isherwood and his like-minded friends were reluctant to take any serious steps in a direction harmful to them. The exception was Edward Upward, a writer without talent who chose to transform himself into a Zhdanovite literary policeman, much as Kim Philby was to convert himself into a KGB general. Politics for Isherwood therefore remained a matter of striking a pose, in order to be able to pass as someone who in spite

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of appearances really should not be counted among The Enemy. Another conceivable escape was to live abroad among people who could not discern English privilege for what it was, or if they did, then they admired it and would have wanted it for themselves.

This latter was the course Isherwood followed when he moved to Berlin at the end of the Twenties. The moment was dramatic. Hitler and the Nazis were in the penultimate stage of their seizure of power. Writing stories about Berliners, Isherwood seemed to be posting dispatches from the front line, and it was this immediacy which justified the critics in their reiterated hopes for him.

Years afterward, Isherwood expressed surprise that he had never thought of interviewing or meeting Nazis when it would have been so easy and obvious to do so. Nazis and Nazism appear in his stories only at a tangent because they were in fact of no real or moral concern to him, any more than the Communists were. The stories, and supporting parallel accounts published then or later by others in this coterie, created an impression of engagement which was flattering but quite untrue. Far from engaging with others, Isherwood was bent on self-discovery, and Berlin offered a providential stage upon which to dramatize himself to his own satisfaction. The characters whom he evoked in his stories were chosen for the light they threw upon him, and the strongest of them were not even German but English, like Sally Bowles or Mr. Norris. Displaced bohemianism like theirs was indeed a privilege in that other people invariably had to pay for it in every sense.

From then on, Isherwood was preoccupied with the homosexuality which he had confirmed in himself in Berlin. Whether a writer can build anything more than confession upon his sexuality is open to doubt. Although his homosexuality can be inferred from the Berlin stories, Isherwood repressed confession of it, on the understandable grounds that he would have been liable to prosecution under English law at that time. Narrating his self-discovery, he therefore proved untrue to himself—once again standing on the privilege to do as he liked without having to account for it. Not responsible for politics, he was not going to be responsible for his lovers either.

The second move of his life was to California in 1930. With hindsight, this was evidently disengagement of a decisive kind. Not even the war against Hitlerism was going to undermine his privilege to do as he pleased. What he had done now was to put a distance between himself and all those who felt public or civic responsibility to fight the war. To adopt his own metaphors, he had settled The Test by becoming The Other and even The Enemy himself, one of the narrow and selfish old grown-ups whom he had once derided and rejected. In California too there were many prepared to admire him just for his exercise of privilege.

The likelihood was that in California he would find little or no literary material. In the event, he tried to repeat what he had done before in Berlin, and use bohemian characters, real people, his acquaintances locally, to illuminate himself. Since he had already done all the self-discovering that he could, his writing over the thirty years he spent in California became feebler and feebler, the fictions disintegrating into little heaps of dead gossip. No morality is involved; nothing is better than anything else, and therefore everything is equally bland. The key Isherwood word is "grin," and the older he became the more crucial was the timing of its use: the effect of his writing came to life in the grin, a second Cheshire Cat, with nothing behind it.

It might have been possible for him to assert that as an artist he was responsible only to his art, and California suited it. The argument is not very appealing, but Jean-Paul Sartre used it successfully to justify writing and staging his plays in Paris under German occupation. I suspect that Isherwood did not take this line because he knew it to be untrue, unbelievable, and that he had gone to California primarily to be safely out of the war, never mind art. Be that as it may, at the age of seventy-three he published *Christopher and His Kind*, an attempt to come

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to terms with himself and his past. At last he could declare his preoccupying homosexuality in the certain knowledge of approval rather than sanction.

The reality of his Berlin days, he revealed, had been his meeting a boy called Heinz, with whom he lived, journeying together in much of Europe as well as to his mother in England. It proved impossible to obtain papers for Heinz to become a refugee, and when he was obliged to return to Germany, he was imprisoned for failing to do military service, and in due course was drafted into Hitler's army. Though pained by the separation, Isherwood conveys no sense that he might be responsible in any degree for Heinz's fate. On the contrary, he often reflects how much better his prospects are without Heinz. Politics had put a convenient stop to their mutual exploitation of one another.

About homosexuality, ostensibly so central to him, Isherwood proved to have nothing to say. No insight into motivation, no account of putative gains or losses, no awareness of having used his position and money to seduce Berlin boys who might or might not have been able to defend themselves; only a repetition of lust, with the occasional outburst against women or what he flatly asserts to be "the horror of marriage." Glorying in having disengaged himself from everyone and everything with no cost to himself, he ends his book at the point when he sets off to America with Auden, "exchanging grins."

With narcissistic energy, Isherwood exposed the lying and prevarication of his earlier writing, which explains why no extract from the memoir is suitable for *Where Joy Resides*. The candor compels admiration, though qualified by revulsion at the dishonest and cowardly egoist he portrays himself to be. Is the portrait true, or a rationalization, or maybe an eleventh-hour romanticization? It hardly matters. It is a document in its way. Isherwood was finally telling everyone who had looked to him for hope that in his life he was glad to have found only privilege.

Young Winston's salvation

Winston S. Churchill The Story of the Malakand Field Force: An Episode of Frontier Warfare. Norton, 233 pages, $18.95. The Boer War. Norton, 405 pages, $19.95. My African Journey. Norton, 134 pages, $17.95

reviewed by David Fromkin

On the centenary of Sir Winston Churchill's birth, a definitive edition of his complete works was prepared for publication in Great Britain in a limited edition edited by the Churchill scholar Tom Hartman. That was in 1974; and now, some fifteen years later, Hartman, working with the British publishers Leo Cooper Ltd., has begun republishing the same texts (but with newly written forewords by himself) in a commercial edition.

Copyright restrictions that did not apply to the 1974 Centenary Edition because it was a limited edition prevent the publication of many of these volumes; so Leo Cooper cannot reprint the complete works of Churchill, but says he will offer such volumes as he can.

Of the Cooper volumes that have already appeared, a few have been printed in an American edition by W. W. Norton & Co. They are selected from Churchill's earliest works. The volumes are handsomely presented, uniform in appearance, and wear matching dust jackets. Tom Hartman's forewords offer useful bibliographic information about each book.

The volumes issued by Norton are Churchill's first book, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* (1898); his fourth and fifth books, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* and *Ian Hamilton's March* (both 1900), issued in one volume under the title *The Boer War* (bestowed upon it, not by Churchill, but by the editor of this edition in 1974); and his eighth book, *My African Journey* (1908).

Of works dating from the same period in Churchill's life, Norton is *not* publishing his second book, *The River War* (1899); his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

third book, the novel *Savrola* (1900); his sixth book, a volume of collected speeches called *Mr. Brodrick's Army* (1903); or his seventh book, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1906), which *The Times Literary Supplement* described as being "certainly among the two or three most exciting political biographies in the language."

In a release from its publicity department to reviewers, Norton describes the volumes it *is* issuing as constituting "a uniform edition of the early writings" of Churchill. Yet half the early writings, including some of the more important ones, are omitted from it. Norton's phrase is accurate but may be misleading, for "uniform edition" somehow suggests a complete set. Indeed Norton may have misled itself, for when I telephoned I discovered that its publicity department did not know that this was *not* a complete edition—and, not knowing that four of Churchill's eight first works had been omitted, was unable to tell me on what basis some volumes had been included and others not.

So much for fame! Churchill was the greatest public figure of the twentieth century, while I am a face in the crowd; but publishing houses, in their carelessness and unconcern, are levelers—they treat us all alike—and Churchill's most recent publisher knows as little about his works as the publisher of my most recent book knows about mine.

Deciding to become a professional writer was young Winston Churchill's salvation. Until then he had been a failure. His father had held him in low regard. At Harrow he had been at the bottom of his class. So low had been his academic attainments that his father had given up all thought of his going to a university. Applying instead to the military academy, Sandhurst, he was humiliated by proving unable to pass the entrance examinations until the third try. Though he graduated well from Sandhurst, in his first couple of years as a subaltern in the Fourth Hussars he was unable to find the quick path to glory for which he longed—and, more prosaically, was unable to live on his salary, and fell steadily into debt to meet expenses.

It was then that Churchill's friend, the improbably named General Sir Bindon Blood, offered him a chance to come along as a war correspondent on a punitive expedition to India's Northwest Frontier. The year was 1897, and Churchill was twenty-three; he jumped at the chance, and took leave from his regiment to do so.

Once he had filed his dispatches from the front, it occurred to Churchill that he might put them together into a book. Clearly he had competition, for other journalists were in the field: thus on August 17, 1897, riding into the battle of Landakai as correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*, Churchill reported a heroic action in which Lord Fincastle, the correspondent of *The Times*, was later to be awarded the Victoria Cross for his attempts to save the life of Lieutenant Greaves, the correspondent of *The Times of India*.

Churchill rushed to get his book written and in print before Fincastle of *The Times* could publish his—but lost the race. Moreover, having entrusted the copy editing of his manuscript to a relative in England who proved incompetent, Churchill found "200 misprints, blunders & mistakes" and believed that his book, as printed, was shaming. Readers, he believed, would find it "an example of what my father would have called my slovenly shiftless habits." Again a disappointment to the shade of his father, he was back, it seemed, to his pattern of failure.

But fortune smiled upon him: the book sold well, earned him money, and was enthusiastically received. The reviewer of *The Athenaeum*, while noting that "one word is printed for another, words are defaced by shameful blunders, and sentence after sentence ruined by the punctuation of an idiot," and surmising that it must have been copy edited "by a mad printer's reader," discerned genius in the author and found that in Churchill's style at its best, the great Burke spoke again in passages that, as military history, would have been worthy of Napier.

Churchill had organized *The Story of the*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Malakand Field Force methodically. He had begun by placing the story he had to tell in its geographic setting, on the Indian side of the mountainous frontier that divides what is now Pakistan from Afghanistan. He described the warlike Pathan hill tribes who inhabit that area, and told how, inspired by a religious leader known as "the Mad Mullah," they had come into conflict with the British Government of India. He then told of the attack by these tribes on British military installations at Malakand and Chakdara in the middle of the summer of 1897, and of the Government of India's immediate response in forming and sending out a powerful Field Force under the command of General Blood to repulse the attack. The remaining three-quarters of the book were then devoted to a detailed chronicle of how General Blood's forces moved forward and pacified the tribes; and it was the picture this provided of the routine of daily life in frontier warfare that especially struck such admiring readers of the book as Lord Salisbury, the all-powerful Prime Minister, who sent for Churchill to congratulate him and offer future assistance.

Within months of the book's appearance, an exciting new opportunity presented itself. Lord Kitchener, commander of the Egyptian army and of the British forces in Kenya, was planning an invasion of the Sudan to avenge the death of General Gordon at Khartoum; and Churchill managed to secure appointment as an officer in the Twenty-first Lancers and as a war correspondent for *The Morning Post*. Present at the famous battle of Omdurman which crowned the reconquest of the Sudan, Churchill emerged from the campaign with a second successful book, *The River War*.

Now that he was earning vastly more money as an author than as an army officer, Churchill chose to resign from the service and to support himself as a writer while seeking success in politics. His brilliant father had risen to become Chancellor of the Exchequer; his dream was to exceed his father and become Prime Minister. But politics did not pay: a seat in Parliament at that time carried no salary with it. The money would have to come from his writings. So he embarked on his program of becoming rich in one field in order to become famous in another.

He succeeded on both counts almost immediately. In October 1889 he went out to cover the emerging war in South Africa for *The Morning Post*, having obtained what his son and biographer later admiringly described as "the most lucrative contract into which any newspaper correspondent had entered up to this date." The following month, having just arrived in South Africa, Churchill plunged into the adventure that was to make him world-famous: as a passenger on a train ambushed by the Boers, though a civilian, he organized a heroic if hopeless defense; and, having then been taken prisoner, he made a daring solitary escape and, with a price on his head, made his way across hundreds of miles to the Portuguese colony of Mozambique and freedom by Christmastime.

The two volumes that Churchill published in 1900, and that are here reprinted together under the title *The Boer War*, tell the story of Churchill's adventures and also describe campaigns in the South African war. As history, they have been superseded long since; those looking for an authoritative account of these events can find it in Thomas Pakenham's *The Boer War* (1979). As for Churchill's exciting firsthand account of his escape from the Boer prison camp, it is best read in his autobiography, *My Early Years* (1930), written later, when he was free to tell the whole story.

But Churchill's journalism had fulfilled its purpose: it now supported him in his political career. In 1900, when these Boer War volumes appeared, he was elected to Parliament, taking his seat in 1901. In 1905 he was appointed to his first government post, in which capacity he took the trip to Africa in the summer of 1907 that he describes in *My African Journey*. It is a slight piece of writing, well below the level of what Churchill could do.

The journey to Africa provided a much-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

needed rest for Churchill, in the nature of a holiday, and the magazine serial rights reimbursed him for all his personal out-of-pocket expenses. Royalties on the book gave him a clear five-hundred-pounds profit on the trip. On such matters he was obliged to dwell, for no matter how far he advanced toward leadership of his country—and by 1908, he had advanced far for his years—his career in politics was a luxury made possible only by his journalism; for it was as a writer who sold his work by the word that Churchill supported both his politics and himself.

From the outset, critics of Churchill's books objected that he had written them to promote himself and that he was the hero of his stories. Even his adoring mother, having read the first dispatches that were to form the basis of his Malakand Field Force book, wrote to caution him, "Forgive a piece of advice... but be modest. All yr feats of valour are sure to come out & people will know. Let it be from others & not from yrself."

As late as the 1920s, those who read his books continued to make fun of his habit of writing always about himself. Of Churchill's history of the First World War, Lord Balfour famously remarked that Winston had written an "autobiography disguised as a history of the universe," while another colleague commented that "Winston has written an enormous book about himself and called it *The World Crisis*."

But by the end of the Second World War, others came to recognize what Churchill had always felt instinctively: that his life and the public life of his times were interwoven. Churchill was the only person on any side (with the doubtful exceptions of Franklin Roosevelt, whose role in the Wilson Administration's direction of the war was relatively unimportant, and of Philippe Petain) to have been in the inner circle that directed the Second World War as well as the First. Not since Palmerston a century before had anyone been at the center of world politics for so long. Winston Churchill was the only person who plausibly could have written the political history of the first half of the twentieth century in the first person.

So we now read these early works of his for what was once regarded as their flaw; we read them not for what he tells of his subject, but for what he tells us of himself. We leaf again through the pages of *The Malakand Field Force* not because we care about or even remember General Bindon Blood, and not because we take an interest in the Mad Mullah—for we have seen far madder mullahs since—but because the author now fascinates us all as much as he once fascinated only himself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

154 WOOSTER STREET USA 10012 212.353.1702

THROUGH 17 MARCH

Guy Goodwin

Swan Quarter

24 MARCH – 21 APRIL

Mary Beth Edelson

Universal Pictures: The Paintings

Dolan/Maxwell ***New York***

1701 WALNUT STREET USA 19013 215.665.1701

Dolan/Maxwell ***Philadelphia***

THROUGH 31 MARCH

David Shapiro

New Works on Paper

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letters

New life from old records

To the Editors:

I couldn't agree with Samuel Lipman more, or less, in his November article in *The New Criterion*, "New Life from Old Records." Regarding performance practice in the inter-bellum decades, especially anything vocal, he is spot on. Never on the giant symphonic stage today shall we hear the equivalent, although I invite Mr. Lipman to Boston's smaller theaters to witness the real thing, happening again.

Oddly, I tuned in to the Jessye Norman/New York Philharmonic concert Mr. Lipman reviewed, during the Mahler, when she sounded jes' fine, and tuned out later, for the very reasons he suggested. (She has appeared locally to similar effect.) Therefore, owing to our critical proximity in music, I trust Mr. Lipman will not take offense when I say that he has a terrible ear for sound.

Like Mr. Lipman, I grew up with 78s and find them still to be wonderful vehicles for music. Unlike him, I cannot subscribe to the view that everything new is better: "Direct Metal Mastering [an early 1980s' development in transferring master tapes to LP] has made possible a hitherto unknown dynamic range at minimal distortion to be incised on the vinyl disc." That reminds me of the RCA publicist who, in 1949, wrote these words about the seven-inch 45 RPM record: "Now! For the first time! Records completely distortion-free!" When Mr. Lipman hears the glory of the Golden Age of Stereo Records (1956-66), not to mention the superb 78s, reproduced on true "high-end" phonographs, I wager he will change his views.

And he will no longer be so sanguine about CDs.

The truth is, when you strive to play every record rightly—or, as I say, to audition recorded history—one result is inescapable: Every form has its peak, every form has its price. Music reproduction, as both art and science, has far to go *and digital is not the perfect solution.*

Clark Johnsen
Boston, MA

Samuel Lipman replies:

I am glad that Mr. Johnsen seems to agree with my musical taste. I must say, however, that he uses the word "sound" curiously. For him, it doesn't seem to have anything to do with the quality of the performance, but only to do with the quality of the recording. I don't plead guilty by any means to a "terrible" ear for recorded sound, but I do find myself unable to worship at the altar of any particular technological achievements, be they digital CDs or 1956-66 LP pressings. The evidence of my own ears tells me that Direct Metal Mastering produces superior LPs. I would agree that "digital is not the perfect solution." Who, after all, could think that in such wordly matters there can be a perfect solution? I would only caution that the track record of objections to new sound-recording media—among them electrical 78s, mono LPs, and stereo LPs—is nothing to be proud of. In technology, unlike art, the last laugh is usually with the new developments.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Redefining culture and democracy

To the Editors:

The splendid survey of our current spiritual disarray offered by Samuel Lipman's "Redefining Culture and Democracy" in *The New Criterion* for December 1989 ought to be required reading for every educated American. His modest titular promise merely to clarify two key terms in our social lexicon veils an analysis of compelling moral depth and historical breadth.

Taken by itself, Mr. Lipman's redefining is conceptual reclamation work, the more welcome because sorely needed. He succeeds better in this, I think, with culture than with democracy, where he strikes me as having too readily followed Matthew Arnold, whom he properly hails as his (and our) predecessor, in *Culture and Anarchy*, in this order of speculation. Arnold saw in democracy only a social instrument, mere "machinery," as he called it. Mr. Lipman agrees, similarly defining it as in its best conception "a mechanism for arranging the social division of political power." But surely wherever democracy has been no more than a means for assuring an equitable polity, it has not long remained even that, witness the French Revolution. Where it has taken deepest root, as in the English-speaking countries, it has been more broadly conceived as an extension into politics of Judeo-Christian morality—not the democracy of Robespierre, nor even perhaps of Jefferson, but of Lincoln. This is something more valuable than a polity whose main boast, as Arnold scathingly put it, was that everyone was "free to do as he pleased."

This reservation detracts nothing from Mr. Lipman's sound contention that even at its best political freedom is no guarantee of the kind of culture he calls the life of the mind, a fructifying commerce with that "best that has been known and thought in the world" which Arnold deemed it the modern critic's chief business to propagate. By itself democracy just as readily tolerates the value-void anthropological conception of culture Mr. Lipman denounces, defined as the sum total of human activity, good or bad. This is true because, as he argues, culture is prior to democracy, logically as well as historically.

Is religion in turn prior to culture? The question is prompted by Mr. Lipman's several pointed references to the symbiosis of the two. He regrets the "gutting of organized religious belief" because he sees the profound truths that inform culture as being "often though not always" of religious provenance, religion being historically "the primary source of mankind's highest values." Though he gives no clear answer to the question, his reference to culture's function in spiritually devitalized times as "our best secular means of transcendence" suggests the possibility of its surviving its traditional source. The issue is of course one of daunting complexity, perhaps even impossible of final resolution.

In any case, at the moment it is further complicated and highlighted because some leaders of organized religion itself have made their peace with precisely the debased kind of culture Mr. Lipman so trenchantly anatomizes. I am one of thousands of Episcopalians, for painful example, currently protesting our clergy's facile embracement of the very libertinism alias "cultural democracy" and the very "pan-sexuality" he rightly (and courageously) deplores.

In the murky moral light of the moment many people will deride Mr. Lipman's concern "to question the current degraded definitions of culture and democracy" as an impulse to sterile logomachy. They lack the imaginative vision to see that such a phrase as "drug culture" does more than becloud thinking; its very currency tends to disarm a society menaced by degeneracy. And so "Redefining Culture and Democracy" is especially timely as among other things a lucid reminder of Coleridge's insight that words "are seldom misused without avenging themselves."

Emerson R. Marks
Wellesley Hills, MA

Samuel Lipman replies:

I am grateful to Professor Marks, a Coleridge scholar, for his sympathetic words about my essay. As for Professor Marks's tribute to Lincolnian democracy, surely one can pay all honor to Lincoln, and to his achievement in saving the Union, without losing sight of the fact that the hero of what I called the expansive view of democracy is not Lincoln but Whitman. Professor Marks does indeed show a great awareness of the limitations of democracy, not as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

practical politics, but as value-forming doctrine. I think he is correct to ask whether culture can survive on its own without the religious matrix that so often has given it birth. In the short run, I think that culture, defined as the monuments of civilization, can function as a kind of holding action, preserving the past until a better day. In the long run, I am afraid that a culture of this world, without a metaphysics of the next, will prove insufficient. Professor Marks's quotation from Coleridge about words avenging their misuse is harrowingly timely; the avenging is already taking place in our colleges and universities, and it is only sad that the (relatively) innocent victims of the process are the young.

The Wexner Center

To the Editors:
In his otherwise accurate (and very welcome) review of Peter Eisenman's Wexner Center (December 1989), Hilton Kramer predicts that the building's "giant scaffold . . . will become an abiding object of derision for those who are obliged, day after day and year after year, to pass under its sprawling, unsheltering presence." Not so. The first time a student falls out of this inviting jungle gym to his maiming or death—and it won't take long—Ohio State's attorneys will recommend the dismantling of this "attractive (?) nuisance." Mr. Eisenman's blindness to the dangerous use to which his cutesy structure will be put reveals better than anything else in the design its total lack of relationship to context.

Robert J. Ellrich
University of Washington
Seattle, WA

Correction

It has been called to my attention that, contrary to a statement in my article on the Wexner Center, neither The Gap nor Banana Republic is owned by The Limited. My apologies for this mistake.

Hilton Kramer

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

"Photography Until Now" at MOMA *by Hilton Kramer*
Whitaker Chambers as man of letters *by Sam Tanenhaus*
Art in the Eighties at the Hirshhorn *by Roger Kimball*
The young Coleridge *by Bruce Bawer*
Monet in the Nineties *by Andrew Forge*
H. L. Mencken *by Terry Teachout*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sewanee Writers' Conference

July 17-29, 1990
University of the South
Sewanee, Tennessee

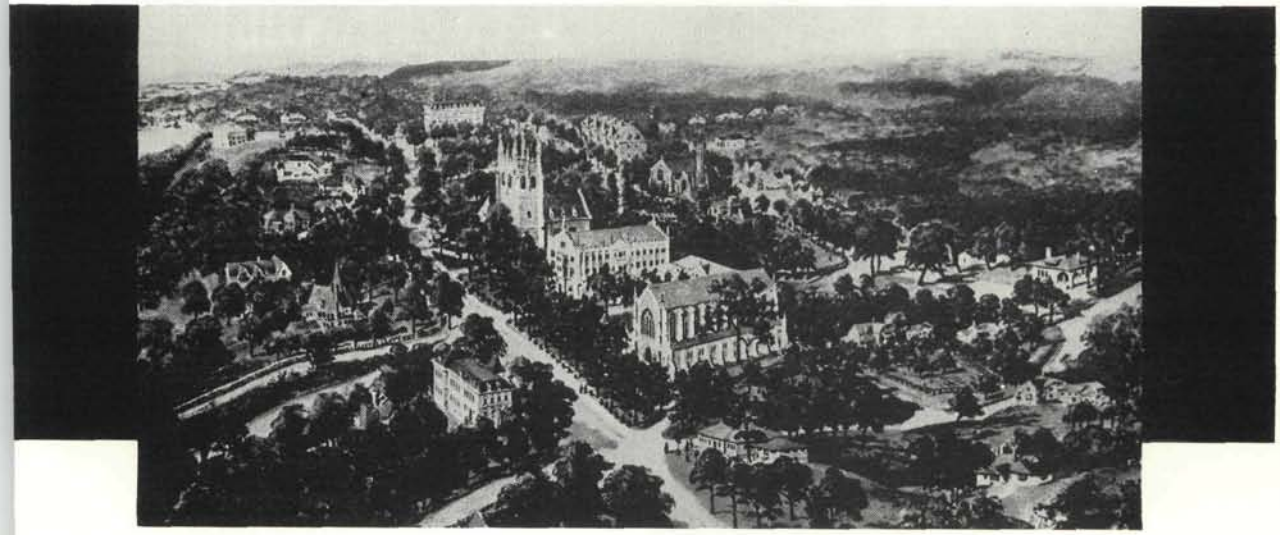
Workshops in Poetry, Fiction, and Playwriting.

Peter Davison	Wendy Hammond	Tim O'Brien
Ellen Douglas	Tina Howe	Monroe Spears
Mona Van Duyn	John T. Irwin	Robert Stone
Marianne Gingher	Donald Justice	Peter Taylor
Emily Grosholz	Andrew Lytle	Jarvis Thurston
	Charles Martin	

Additional writers, critics, editors, and agents will take part.

Fellowships and Scholarships available.

WYATT PRUNTY, DIRECTOR
For information write or call:
William Clarkson, Associate Director
SEWANEE WRITERS' CONFERENCE, 310P ST. LUKE'S HALL
SEWANEE, TN 37375 — (615) 598-1141



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Leland Bell

Recent Drawings & Paintings

March 17 - April 18, 1990

Self Portrait, Charcoal on paper, 30" x 22", 1989

Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, Ltd.

50 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019
Tel: (212)765-3540
Fax: (212)541-4478

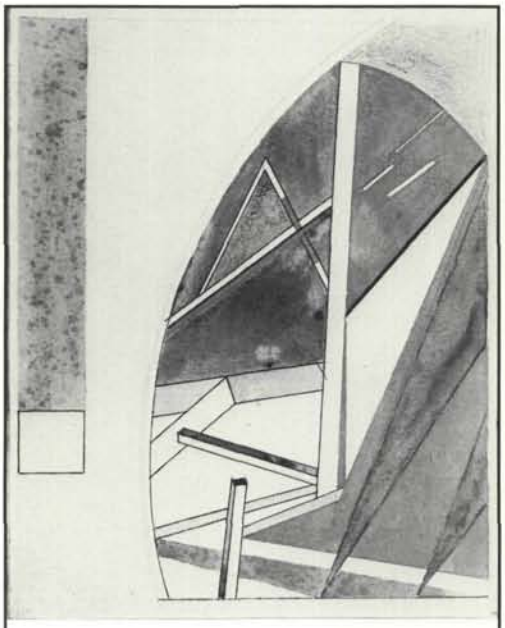
MICHAEL HEIZER

Object Sculptures

March 3 to March 24, 1990

Knoedler & Company 19 East 70 Street, New York Telephone (212) 794-0550

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



El Lissitzky, *Proun Study*, 1919/20

THE
AVANT GARDE
IN RUSSIA
1915-1930

Helen Serger
la boetie, inc.

9 East 82nd Street
New York 10028
Tel. (212) 535-4865

important works by

balthus
butler
chagall
dubuffet
giacometti
lam
mac iver
mason
millares
miró
riopelle
rouan
saura
tanguy
zao wou-ki

pierre matisse gallery
41 east 57th street
new york 10022

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paul
CADMUS

Enrico
DONATI

Dimitri
HADZI

Edward
HOPPER

Matsumi
KANEMITSU

Reginald
MARSH

Henry
MOORE

Pablo
PICASSO

Auguste
RODIN

Theodoros
STAMOS

Francisco
ZUNIGA

LOUIS NEWMAN
GALLERIES
322 North Beverly Drive
Beverly Hills, CA 90210 • (213) 278-6311

"For Your Viewing Pleasure"
acrylic on canvas, 60 X 44", 1989

WILLIAM
PLEVIN-FOUST
Recent Paintings and Drawings
March 2 through March 21
Tuesday through Sunday,
12 to 6 p.m.

BOWERY GALLERY
NEW YORK

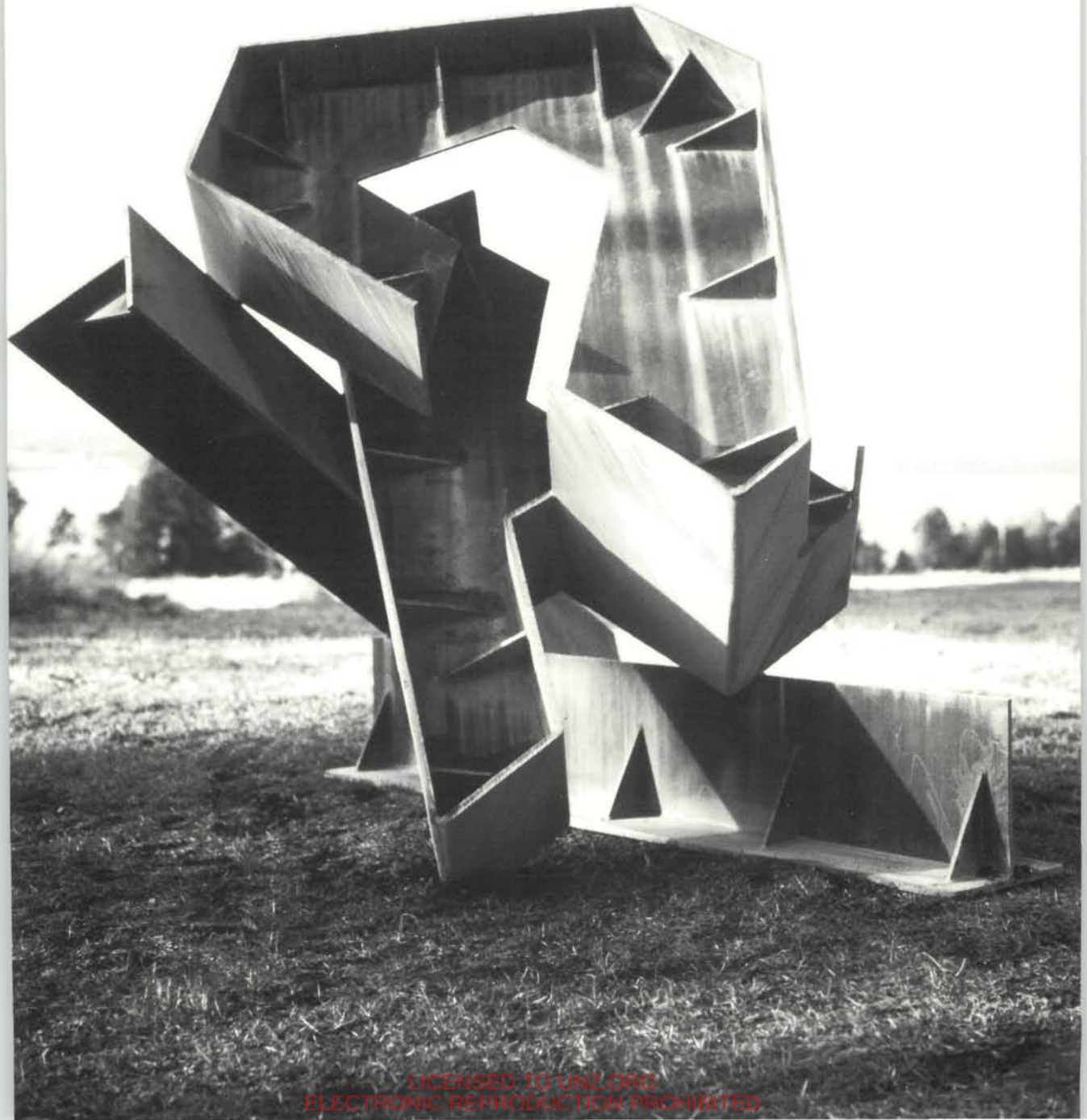
121 Wooster Street
New York, New York 10012
212-226-9543

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RUBINOFF

Jeffrey Rubinoff
Studio, Hornby Island,
B.C., Canada V0R 1Z0
(604) 335-0668

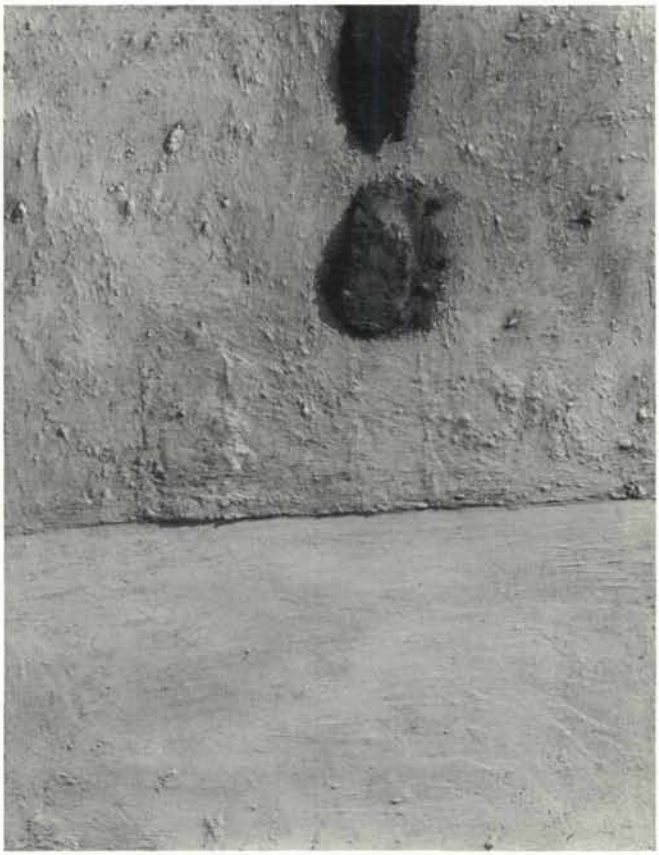
Texada #1 1983
Cor-ten plate
Height 7'



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RONALD BLADEN PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE

MARCH 7-APRIL 7, 1990



UNTITLED, C.1956-59, OIL ON PANEL, 48¼ X 36¾ INCHES.

WASHBURN GALLERY 41 EAST 57TH STREET NEW YORK 10022 212/753-0546 FAX 212/935-7697

The New Criterion
850 Seventh Avenue
Suite 503
New York NY 10019

Second Class Postage
Paid at New York, NY
and at additional
Mailing Offices

DDEPTFBYLRZ98ZA 11/30/90
DEPT OF FINE ARTS
BAYLOR UNIV 8339PG
WACO, TX 76798

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED